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ESSAYS

ON

SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES

IN

THE WRITINGS OF ST. PAUL,

AND IN OTHER PARTS OF THE

NEW TESTAMENT.



BY

RICHARD WHATELY, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF ST. ALBAN'S HALL, OXFORD, AND LATE FELLOW OF
ORIEL COLLEGE.

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ESSAYS

SOME OF THE BIRINGLITIA

THE WITNESS OF ST. PAUL

BY THE REV. J. H. ...

NEW TESTAMENT

RICHARD WHITBY, D.D.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

LONDON:

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TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

THIS VOLUME

OF WHICH THE SUBSTANCE WAS PREACHED

BEFORE THEM

AT SAINT MARY'S CHURCH

AND WHICH IS PUBLISHED AT THE RECOMMENDATION

OF SEVERAL OF THEIR NUMBER

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR SINCERE WELL-WISHER

THE AUTHOR.

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TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

THIS FOLIO

OF WHICH THE SUBJECT WAS TREATED

BEFORE THEM

AT SAINT MARY'S CHURCH

AND WHICH IS FURNISHED AT THE RECOMMENDATION

OF SEVERAL OF THEIR BISHOPS

IS HEREBY ASSIGNED

BY THEIR CARE WILLIAMS

THE FOLIO

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PREFACE.

IT is not to be wondered that any argumentative work, not altogether confined to the inculcation of doctrines universally admitted, should, if it attract any degree of public attention, excite also, at first, some animadversion. Accordingly, various censures,—critical strictures,—objections, &c. have been directed, more or less, against either some part, or the whole, of, I believe, every one of my publications. And it is not unlikely that some of my readers may wish to know whether I shall defend myself against all or any of these; and in what form. I cannot perhaps better

answer such an inquiry, than by republishing the substance of a letter sent by me to the editor of a newspaper (and inserted by him) in reply to an invitation from him to vindicate myself, through the medium of his columns, from an attack against me which had appeared in them. It has no particular reference either to the Author, to the character, or to the subject, of that particular attack.

“ . . . Though I do not intend to enter upon any discussion of the subject of the attack in question, I will briefly state, and request you to publish, my reasons for declining to do so; as they apply, not only to the present, but to all other similar cases. . . . My abstaining from reply is in conformity with a resolution I have adopted, never to answer any attacks whatever.

“ This resolution does not spring from an arrogant contempt of all opponents, indiscriminately. On the contrary, I have, before now, taken occasion, in subsequent editions of my works, to express more clearly what had been thought liable to misinterpretation, and to supply deficiencies which had been pointed out. And if I shall ever find reason to believe that any thing

I have advanced is unscriptural, or otherwise erroneous, I shall take care to retract it.

“ But whenever, on the other hand, it shall appear that my statements have been misrepresented, or the force of my arguments underrated, either from carelessness, intellectual deficiency, or sophistical design, I shall leave to the works themselves, with the aid of time, the accomplishment of my vindication in the eyes of candid and intelligent readers; and those of an opposite character I could not hope to convince by any reply that could be framed. At all events I intend to engage in no paper war with any one.

“ I do not mean to pass any censure on those who are engaged in controversy: but most persons, I imagine, will admit that the prevailing tendency is rather towards an excess than a deficiency of polemical writing; and that, even when controversy is begun with the best intentions, it often does more harm than good. Men are so constituted, as to feel (whether as parties or as mere spectators) great interest in a *contest* of any kind, *as* a contest: and a mind thus occupied is seldom in the most fit state for the calm and sober investigation of truth. As fresh and fresh combatants enter the field, each generally becomes more solicitous than the last, about victory, and less about truth; considering rather what may be *said in answer* to each argument, than how much it may contain that is just and valuable: while most of the by-standers meantime, are becoming insensibly more like the auditors of one of the ancient school disputations, or the spectators

of a tournament ; more eager to see which party gets the better, than careful to make up their own minds aright, as to the question debated.

“ Considerations such as these, besides other reasons, have determined me to abstain strictly from all controversy, and (as far as lies in my power, without compromising important truths,) from every thing likely to lead to controversy.

“ This declaration, though it may perhaps prevent some attacks, may very likely invite more. But whether the charges brought against me shall be many or few, I shall leave them all unanswered ; trusting that, if unjust, they will sooner or later fall to the ground of themselves ; and earnestly hoping that the same may be the fate of my own doctrines, if they are indeed at variance with right reason or with God’s word.”

I may add, that the expectations and intentions expressed in the above letter remain unchanged. No circumstances, none at least that I can at present foresee, or even conjecture, will induce me to engage in controversy.

It may be said, indeed, that my answering some one particular charge, would not

necessarily imply my engaging in a course of polemical writing : I might put forth a vindication, once for all, and there stop. But such a procedure, I am inclined to think, would be less prudent than to abstain from reply altogether. Should I once begin, I should be expected to answer all, not only of the objections that have been hitherto brought forward, but of the rejoinders and surrejoinders, &c., which, in such a cause, are usually called forth ; (since “ the beginning of strife is like the letting out of water”) lest I should appear either to treat with undue contempt those who were left unnoticed, or to be silenced by unanswerable arguments. I have thought it most advisable therefore, on the whole, to keep clear of any thing like the opening of a controversy ; always protesting, however, against being understood as casting any censure on those engaged in any contest

of this kind; and only claiming for myself the same liberty of judgment which I am willing to allow to every one else.

The Note relative to the Sabbath, which was subjoined in the first edition to Essay V., having been very considerably expanded, it has been thought advisable to place it in an Appendix at the end of the Volume; and also to print it in a separate form, for the benefit of the purchasers of the first edition.

The Note "on the Eucharist" has also been transferred to the Appendix.

INTRODUCTION.

It was my object in a former series of Essays to set forth the importance of an earnest and studious attention to the Christian revelation. There is a notion, more commonly entertained than acknowledged, that the Gospel is a mere authoritative republication of natural religion;—that consequently it is chiefly, if not solely, to those of unphilosophical and vulgar minds, incapable of perceiving the internal evidence of this natural religion, and the intrinsic beauty of virtue, that such a revelation is important or needful,—and that, to the more intelligent and refined, it matters little whether or not they inquire minutely into the particulars of that revelation,—whether they believe, or disbelieve, or doubt, its reality — or whether they even propose to themselves the question. With a

view to counteract this (as it may be called) heresy of indifference,—in my view, the most deadly of all errors, not excepting Atheism,—I pointed out and dwelt on several *peculiarities* of the Christian religion; points wherein the Gospel-scheme differs from all other systems of religion, whether pretended revelations, or avowedly the offspring of human reason, that have ever existed. And the contemplation of these peculiarities must evince, I thought, the importance of carefully ascertaining whether the Gospel-revelation is real or fictitious; and if real, of endeavouring to understand as fully as possible its character, and to embrace it heartily as a rule of life. While at the same time the consideration that Christianity differs thus widely from every other religious system, in many important points, and in many wherein they all agree, and, in those very points in which a true revelation might be *expected* to differ from any scheme of man's devising,—this consideration, I say, presents a phenomenon well deserving the attention of such as are candidly inquiring for the evidences of this religion. For till unbelievers can propose some solution of the

phenomenon, other than the truth of the revelation, which in so many centuries they have never accomplished, nor, as far as I know, even attempted, it must afford, at the very least, a strong presumption, that the religion is really from God.^a

These disquisitions seemed to lead naturally to some remarks as to the mode in which the Scriptures should be studied. For if it be supposed (and the notion is very prevalent) that great part of them consist of a series of perplexing difficulties, serving only to exercise the ingenuity of theologians in endless controversies, and barren of all edifying application, or even leading to dangerous practical consequences, the result will be, that the student's attention will be confined to a small portion of the Sacred

^a "It may be thought that some apology is necessary for the frequent reference made to the treatise just mentioned, and, occasionally, to some other works of my own. It appeared to me, however, that either of the other two alternatives would have been more objectionable; viz. either to omit entirely much that was needful for the elucidation of the subject in hand; or, to repeat, in the same or in other words, what had been already published."—*Preface to Elements of Rhetoric*, p. viii.

Records, and to that portion which will, by itself, furnish the most imperfect view of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity: a result which cannot fail to foster the error above alluded to, of undervaluing the Gospel revelation, and regarding it as a mere authoritative declaration of certain moral truths.

The first step then in an examination of the Gospel-scheme, after we have once been convinced generally, that it is *worth* examining, is to guard against the bias to which we are liable either from the apprehension of perplexing difficulties in it, or from a suspicion of the inutility or dangerous tendency of its most remarkable doctrines. Such a bias cannot fail to deprave the judgment as to the real character of the Christian revelation. In the preliminary Essay, accordingly, I have endeavoured not only to inculcate the importance of such an earnest pursuit of Truth, and steady adherence to it, as may overcome the seductions of indolence, and of seeming expediency, but I have pointed out also the several modes of self-deceit by which men persuade themselves that they are, when in fact they are not, sincere lovers of Truth;

and the way in which that tendency may be best combated; namely, by assigning in every case, not, as is usually done, the second, but the first place, to the inquiry, what is TRUE?

In the Second Essay, I have offered some remarks on the neglect or dread, prevalent among many persons, of the Apostle Paul's writings; on the causes which have produced this;—and the consequences to which it leads.

In the succeeding four Essays, I have treated of certain doctrines which have given rise to much controversy, and particular views of which have mainly contributed to the dread felt by many of this Apostle's writings. I have accordingly endeavoured to shew that the doctrines in question, as taught by Paul, afford no just ground of alarm; and that the extravagant representation of them that some have given, has arisen from a hasty and partial view of the works of this Apostle. In these Essays I have especially endeavoured to set forth the importance of referring to the Old Testament as an interpreter, by analogy, of the New.

Some other principles of interpretation, frequently overlooked, and very essential to the right understanding both of Paul's Epistles, and of the other Sacred Writings, I have pointed out, in the Seventh and Eighth Essays, as applicable to the doctrinal and to the moral precepts of the New Testament Scriptures. The use to be made of the apparent *contradictions* we so frequently meet with, has been particularly dwelt on; with a view to shew that they ought not to be regarded, as is commonly done, in the light merely of difficulties to be surmounted, but as a peculiar and most wisely contrived mode of instruction.

In the concluding Essay, I have applied the principles before laid down to the ascertainment of the sense of Scripture respecting the doctrine of spiritual influence:—a doctrine not only of the highest practical importance; and one concerning which the greatest difficulties have been started;—but also one in respect of which, more perhaps than any other, Paul's authority has been confidently appealed to by some in support of the most extravagant conclusions, and

for that reason, depreciated or disregarded by others.

In treating of these subjects, it has been my object, not to ascertain, on each point, *everything* that may be reasonably believed and plausibly maintained; but, what we are bound to believe and to maintain *as a part of the Gospel-revelation*; and this distinction I have more than once adverted to, as being one of the highest importance, and not seldom overlooked.

In the prosecution of these inquiries, I have freely availed myself of whatever remarks or illustrations I chanced to meet with in various authors, that appeared suitable to my purpose. As therefore there is, I trust, no novelty in the doctrines inculcated, so there is no pretension to complete originality in the arguments adduced. If I shall have succeeded in selecting such as are at once sound, and generally intelligible, and in arranging and expressing them in a perspicuous and interesting manner, the object proposed will have been accomplished.

I have only to add, that the design of the present Work being, not so much to refute or to advocate the tenets of any particular person or party, by means of an appeal to Scripture, as to facilitate the interpretation of Scripture to those who are seeking in simplicity for divine truths, I trust it will be received by the candid, even among such as may in some points differ from me, with no feeling of party-prejudice or hostile suspicion.

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ESSAY I.

ON THE LOVE OF TRUTH.



§ 1. THAT any one who undertakes to propagate or to maintain any religion should represent it as a *true* one, and should demand reception for it on that ground, seems to us of the present day so natural and unavoidable, that many probably would be ready to take for granted that this must have been the case always;—that the question of “true or false?” must always have stood, as it certainly ought to stand, on the very threshold of every inquiry respecting such a subject; and that all who adhered to an old, or embraced a new religious system, or rejected either, however credulous, or prejudiced, or otherwise bad judges of evidence they might be, yet must have supposed themselves at least to be determined by evidence of some kind or other, to

belief or disbelief in the truth of what was proposed to them. And accordingly, there are, probably, many who do not estimate the full force and importance of our Lord's reply to Pilate, "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the Truth."

A moderate acquaintance, however, with the habits and modes of thought which prevailed among the ancient heathen, may convince us that the real state of things was by no means such as the above reasoning would lead us to suppose. Their minds were, on this subject especially, estranged from the love of truth. Many circumstances indeed concurred to render them habitually indifferent to it. Among the learned, philosophical pursuits seem to have been originally introduced as an elegant recreation (*σχολή*): and there can be no doubt that many at least attached themselves to this or that sect, not from any sincere conviction of the truth of its doctrines, but to furnish themselves with suitable topics for declamations. The Schools of the philosophers were a kind of intellectual palæstra; and there was a close analogy between their disputations, and the prevailing

gymnastic contests: each was a *game*; the object of which was victory, without any ulterior end, but only for the display of strength and skill, bodily or intellectual. And the zealous cultivation of rhetoric, to which the majority of eminent men made all other studies subordinate, and whose most appropriate object is, not the discovery of truth, but the invention of arguments, could not but foster the prevailing disregard of truth. It seems too, to have been the settled conviction of most of those who had the sincerest desire of attaining truth themselves, that to the mass of mankind truth was in many points inexpedient, and unfit to be communicated;—that however desirable it might be for the leading personages in the world to be instructed in the true nature of things, there were many popular delusions which were essential to the well-being of society. And in the foremost rank of these they placed their popular *religions*. Their own notions respecting the Deity were totally unconnected with morality; and they despaired of imbuing the vulgar with the philosophical principles on which *they* made virtue to rest. They made it a point of duty,

therefore, to testify by their example the utmost respect for the established religion; and to impress on the multitude that reverence for the gods, and dread of divine judgment on crimes, which they themselves in their own more private writings derided. They did not however seek to effect this object, (and this is a circumstance deserving of especial attention,) by undertaking *to prove the truth* of the popular religions. He who labours to prove, implies the possibility of doubt, and challenges inquiry; and they well knew that there was no evidence for the existing superstitions which could satisfy doubts, or stand the test of inquiry. The only thing to be done, therefore, was to forbid all doubts as impious,—to suppress all inquiry; and, consequently, to forego even the practice of asserting the truth of the established systems, which had, as Paul expresses it, “changed the truth of God into a lie.”^a They were maintained as politically expedient, by the civil magistrates; whose appropriate instrument is not argument, but coercion: and who for the most part utterly disbelieved them, and were sensible that they

^a Rom. i. 25.

could not be established by evidence, yet were convinced that they ought to be established by law. And as it is the nature of legal enactments to produce, not belief, but merely outward conformity and submission, it was the inevitable result of this state of things that the ideas of *religion* and of *truth*,—of pious demeanour, and of sincere belief,—should come to be completely disjoined in men's minds; and that they should even be somewhat startled at the very pretension to *truth as resting on evidence*, in any religion, and at the requisition of *faith* in it, on the ground of *its truth*. It was what they had never been used to. Philosophers of the most discordant tenets, poets of all descriptions, politicians and other men of business, amidst all the variety of their views and conduct, had always concurred in maintaining the popular religions, and in maintaining them on any other ground than that of truth: "The worship of the gods is an institution of our country;—these rites are venerable from their antiquity;^b—the

^b Such was the remark of Tacitus respecting the religion of the Jews: "Hi ritus, quoquo modo inducti, vetustate defenduntur;" a description much more suitable to the pagan

neglect of them would argue disrespect for our ancestors, and contempt for the laws ;—a respect for religion is useful for maintaining due subordination among the people :”—These, and such as these, were their arguments ; and the conclusion accordingly drawn was, that every man *ought to worship* the gods according to the established institutions : truth, and belief in the truth, seem, in this matter, to have scarcely entered their minds.

Pilate accordingly seems to have been perplexed by our Lord's reply, stating that he had come into the world for the purpose of bearing "witness to the truth." His inquiry, "What is truth?" does not seem (as an eminent writer imagines) to have been made in jest ; the Roman Governor was evidently in no jesting mood, nor at all disposed to treat Jesus with contempt ; but (for whatever reason) was very seriously intent on investigating his case, and procuring his acquittal. Whether there be sufficient ground or not, for

religions ; both in respect of the fact, and of the opinions of the respective votaries. It was the boast of the Jews that they had "the form of knowledge and of the truth, in the Law." Rom. ii. 20.

the conjecture of some, that he was in expectation of Jesus assuming the temporal sovereignty, by the employment of those miraculous powers of which no one could have been ignorant, and was disposed from views of personal aggrandizement to favour his pretensions ; at any rate it is plain he was endeavouring to learn what his designs and pretensions were : and hence, eagerly asked, catching, as it were, at his words, “ Art thou a king then ? ” the answer, in which Jesus claims to be a minister of the Truth, seems to have disappointed and perplexed him : “ What is truth ? ” he replied ; as much as to say, “ what has truth to do with the present business ? I wish for your information as to your claims and objects ;—what sovereignty it is that you pretend to, or aim at ; and you tell me about Truth ; what is that to the purpose ? ”

On this and on other occasions, our Lord points out Truth as, in an especial manner, the characteristic of his religion ; “ If ye continue in my words, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free : ” “ I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. ”—“ They that worship God must

worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.”—“ When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he shall guide you into all Truth.”—“ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the Truth.” His great Adversary, on the other hand, is designated by Him as “ a liar, and the father of lies.” And the apostles of Christ, in like manner, perpetually make use of the words “ Truth,” and “ Faith,” to designate the Christian religion: *e. g.* “ God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the Truth.” 1 Tim. ii. 4. “ The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the Truth.” 1 Tim. iii. 15. “ Having your loins girt about with Truth.” Ephes. vi. 14. “ They received not the love of Truth, that they might be saved.” 2 Thess. ii. 10. “ Chosen to salvation, through belief of the Truth.” 2 Thess. ii. 13. “ After we have received the knowledge of the Truth.” Heb. x. 26. “ Ye have purified your souls in obeying the Truth.” 1 Pet. i. 22. “ The way of the Truth shall be evil-spoken of.” 2 Pet. ii. 2. “ Hereby we know that we are of the Truth.” 1 John iii. 19, &c. By all which, more, I conceive, was implied than that the religion *is* true, and is

the *only* true one, and that faith in it is required ; in the present day this would be implied by the very circumstance of preaching any religion ; but in those days the very *pretension* to truth,—the very *demand* of faith, were characteristic distinctions of the Gospel: the Heathen mythology not only *was* not true, but was not even supported as true: it not only *deserved* no faith, but it *demand*ed none. It was needful, therefore, to inform and remind men not merely of the *strength* of the Gospel claims, but of the *nature* of those claims;—to point out not only the *force* of the evidence in its favour, but its appeal to evidence.

Many, indeed, of our Lord's expressions concerning the truth of his religion, have a reference rather to the *types* and shadows of the Mosaic dispensation, than to the *fables* of the Heathen mythology. As contrasted with these last, Christianity was *Truth* as opposed to *falsehood*; as contrasted with the Jewish system, it was *The Truth*, in the sense of "Reality," as distinguished from the *emblems*,—symbols,—representations—of that reality;—from the "shadow of good things to come," contained in the Levitical

Law.^c In this sense it is that the Apostle tells us "the Law was given by Moses, but grace and *truth* came by Jesus Christ:" and this also was probably the chief import of our Lord's expression, "the truth shall make you free;" *i. e.* free from the precise and minute directions, and burdensome ceremonial, of the Mosaic Law, which was instituted for the very purpose of shadowing forth, and preparing the way for, the glorious *truths*, or *realities* of the Gospel.

This consideration, however, does not lessen the force of what has been said respecting the prominent place assigned to the "truth" of Christianity as characteristic of the religion. Its truth, in the sense of reality contrasted with type, and substance with shadow, implies its truth as opposed to falsehood also. It was the same quality that distinguished it from the more *imperfect revelations* of the "Law" on one side, and from the fictions and misconceptions of the Pagans on the other: "the truth as it is in Jesus"^d was to

^c See "Hinds's Catechists' Manual," (p. 264), a book which, in my judgment, no young clergyman or master of a family should be without.

^d Ep. to Ephes. iv. 21.

supersede both the heathen idolatry, by destroying it, and "the Law and the Prophets," not by destroying indeed, but by fulfilling them.

And it should be carefully borne in mind, that though the reiterated allusions to "truth" were in a great degree called forth by the strong contrast which the new religion presented, in this particular, to those at that time opposed to it, the characteristic itself must equally belong to the same religion at all times. The Gospel itself is always and everywhere the same; though particular times and places may require that this or that particular feature of it should be especially *pointed out* and dwelt on. Even so, creeds or sets of articles, employed as a Symbol or test of orthodoxy, may vary, and have varied, according to the emergencies occasioned by the prevalence of particular errors; though the absolute and intrinsic soundness of the articles of faith themselves, must be always the same. Temporary or local circumstances are the cause, not of any articles *being* or not being a part of the Christian faith, but of its being a part which it is needful or not needful to *set forth* prominently, and insist on. And this distinction, though so

obvious, when stated, as to seem scarcely worth mentioning, is often lost sight of in practice. In the times, for instance, even of the early Christian emperors, many of these were urged to put down idolatry and heresy by the civil sword.^e Jesus had indeed forbidden his disciples to draw the sword in his cause, or to call down fire from heaven on those who rejected Him; and had declared his kingdom to be not of this world; and his first followers had propagated his religion by gentle persuasion, “not rendering evil for evil,” but “in meekness instructing them that opposed themselves:” but then, it was replied, that such a procedure was suited only to the first beginnings of Christianity; that the earliest disciples had no power, when as yet magistrates and kings were not arrayed on their side,^f for-

^e “Not more than twenty years after Constantine’s entire possession of the empire, Julius Firmicus Maternus calls upon the Emperors Constantius and Constans to extirpate the relics of the ancient religion; . . . modicum tantum superest, ut legibus vestris . . . extincta idololatriæ pereat funesta contagio.”—PALEY’S *Evidences*, Part II. chap. 9.

^f “Non invenitur exemplum in evangelicis et apostolicis literis, aliquid petitum a regibus terræ pro ecclesia, contra inimicos ecclesiæ: quis negat non inveniri? Sed nondum

cibly to suppress idolatry;—and that our Lord's language to Pilate, and his rejection of the attempts to make Him a king, had reference to the then prevailing expectations of a temporal Messiah. Now there was undoubtedly this expectation of an anointed Son of David, who should reign in bodily person over the Jews, and should bestow on his followers not only the spiritual blessings relating to a future state, but also, worldly power and splendour. And, doubtless, his disclaimer had reference to these expectations: but the question is, was this the cause of

implebatur illa prophetia, et nunc reges intelligite, erudimini, qui judicatis terram; servite Domino in timore. Adhuc enim illud implebatur quod in eodem psalmo paullo superius dicitur; Quare fremuerunt gentes, et populi meditati sunt inania? &c."—AUGUSTINE *Epist.* 93, chap. iii. § 9.

The remainder of the passage is curious, in which this Father goes on to represent the two opposite decrees of King Nebuchadnezzar, as types of the two conditions of the Church; the sentence of death passed on the three pious Jews who refused to worship the golden idol, being typical of the times of the Apostles and Martyrs; and the present time (Augustine's) being represented by the decree of the same king, that whosoever should "speak any thing amiss against the God of those Jews, should be cut in pieces."

Christ's kingdom actually *being* of such a character as He described it, or, merely of *his insisting* on this, in those particular expressions, and on those particular occasions? Are his rebukes to his disciples, for offering to call down fire from heaven, and to fight in his cause, rebukes which were evidently called forth by their mistaken zeal on each occasion; are these to be regarded as having reference to these occasions only, or as descriptive of the character of the religion universally? Now what has been said of the employment of *force*, may equally be applied to the employment of *fraud*, in the cause of Christianity. The Romanists and others, who have practised pious frauds in the cause of Christianity, probably committed (unknown to themselves) a similar error to the one just mentioned, in their view of those passages of Scripture which insist on "truth" as a characteristic feature of the religion: those *expressions*, indeed, were probably called forth in many instances by the peculiar circumstances attending the first promulgation of the Gospel; but the character of the Gospel itself is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

§ 2. But how, it may be said, do these considerations affect us Christians of the present day? We, it is to be hoped, are not chargeable with that culpable carelessness about truth, especially in religious matters, which characterised the ancients. We do *believe* in Jesus as the “Way, and the Truth, and the Life.”

Let it be remembered, however, that as the ancient heathen are not the standard by which we are to be measured; so it is not our superiority to them that will at once acquit us. They had many excuses, of which we have none, for their disregard of truth: in particular, they knew not (as we do) of any religion that did challenge inquiry, and appeal to evidence, and demand well-grounded and firm belief; that taught them to “prove all things, and hold fast that which is right,” and to be “ready to give a reason of their faith.” Do Christians, then, in this respect, show themselves worthy of their peculiar advantages? Do they speak and act altogether consistently with a religion which is built on *Faith* in the *Truth*? The professors of such a religion ought not merely to believe it in sincerity, but to adhere scrupulously to

Truth in the *means* employed on every occasion, as well as in the *ends* proposed, and to follow fearlessly *wherever* Truth may lead.

Now we should recollect that most of the pretended miracles, the “pious frauds,” as they are called, perpetrated by the Papists, and many others, are, or at least were, in the first instance, the work of men who were sincere believers in the truth of their religion; it is, indeed, on this ground alone that they can claim the title of *pious* frauds: but they were men who knew “not what manner of spirit they were of;” they sought to promote, by means of falsehood, the cause of Him who lived and died for the Truth: they believed the Gospel to have come from God, but wanted faith in his power and care to support and prosper it, and turned aside from the straight path of sincerity, to seek for the expedient by the crooked roads of worldly policy. But still, though most unchristian in their spirit, though they had “neither part nor lot in this matter, but were in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,” their general belief in Christianity was doubtless, in most instances, sincere; and I have adverted to their case for

the very purpose of pointing out the important circumstance, that the fullest *conviction of the truth of the cause in which we may be engaged, is no security against our sliding into falsehood,* unless we are sedulous in forming and cherishing a habit of loving, and reverencing, and strictly adhering to truth.

Protestants, however, in these times, it may be said, have no pretended miracles—practise no pious frauds. But how far is this to be attributed to a genuine detestation of falsehood, as odious in *his* sight who lived and died in the cause of Truth, with a firm reliance on his providence; and how far, to a conviction furnished by experience, that fraud is, in the end, detrimental to the cause it is designed to serve, and that in these days its success would be especially short-lived? To what degree each man is in each instance actuated by a love of truth, or by considerations of expediency, can be fully known only to the Searcher of hearts; it is only by the most rigid self-examination that we can approach to the knowledge of this in our case; and it is so far only as the former motive operates that we are acting on Christian principle. It is undoubtedly

a just maxim, that in the long run "honesty is the best policy;" but he whose practice is governed by that maxim is not an honest man.

§ 3. To suggest a few topics for the self-examination I have alluded to, may not be unsuitable with a view to the inquiries we are engaged in. That all, even of the learned and sagacious, have not arrived at true conclusions respecting the doctrines of Scripture, is at once evident from the great *diversity* of their conclusions. It is necessary to consider, therefore, how we may best escape being of the number of those who fall into such various errors;—how we may be best qualified for profiting by the lessons of Him whose "Word is Truth." And this must surely be by a fervent desire and sedulous watchfulness to acquire and preserve a sincere, unbiassed, and candid disposition. Without this, the highest ability, combined with the most laborious study, will do nothing towards the attainment of that object.

That we may not, however, be led into too wide a field of discussion, it should be observed, that I do not propose to inculcate the duty of

veracity in private life ; nor to enter on any metaphysical disquisition on the nature of truth universally, or on what may be regarded as the different species of it ; nor to treat of the various kinds of evidence by which it is to be established ; but simply to speak of the importance, and the difficulty, of cultivating and establishing as a habit, a sincere love of Truth for its own sake, and a steady thorough-going adherence to it in all philosophical, and especially in religious inquiries.

The first step towards attaining this state of mind, and ascertaining how far we have attained it, must evidently be a strong conviction of its value, together with a distrust of ourselves. If we either care not to be lovers of Truth, or take for granted that we are such, without taking any pains to acquire the habit, it is not likely that we ever shall acquire it. I must here, therefore, briefly notice some objections which I have heard urged against the very effort to cultivate such a habit as I am recommending ; though, in fact, they arise from misapprehension, and are directed against a mistaken view of the subject.

(1.) The first is, that we cannot be required to

make *Truth* our main object, but *happiness*;—that our ultimate end is, not the mere knowledge of what is *true*, but the attainment of what is *good*, to ourselves and to others. But this, when urged as an objection against the views here taken, is evidently founded on a mistake as to the meaning of the maxim, that Truth should be sought for its own sake. It is evident, in the first place, that I am not speaking of the pursuit of *all* truth on all subjects. It would be ridiculous for a single individual to aim at universal knowledge; or even at the knowledge of all that is within the reach of the human faculties, and worthy of human study. The question is respecting the pursuit of truth, in each subject, on which each person desires *to make up his mind and form an opinion*. And secondly, the purport of the maxim that, in these points, truth should be our object, is, not that mere barren knowledge without practice,—truth without any *ulterior* end, should be sought; but that truth should be sought and followed confidently, not in each instance, only so far as we *perceive* it to be expedient, and from motives of policy, but with a full conviction both that it is, in the end, always expedient, with a view to

the attainment of ulterior objects, (no permanent advantage being attainable by departing from it,) and also, that, even if some end, otherwise advantageous, *could* be promoted by such a departure, *that* alone would constitute it an evil;—that truth in short, is in itself, independently of its results, preferable to error,—and that honesty claims a preference to deceit, even without taking into account its being the best policy.

(2.) Another objection, if it can be so called, is, that a perfectly candid and unbiassed state of mind, a habit of judging in each case entirely according to the evidence, is *unattainable*. But the same may be said of every other virtue: a perfect regulation of any one of the human passions is probably not more attainable than perfect candour; but we are not, therefore, to give a loose to the passions; we are not to relax our efforts for the attainment of any virtue, on the ground that, after all, we shall fall short of perfection.

(3.) Another objection which I have heard is, that it is not even desirable, were it possible, to bring the mind into a state of perfectly unbiassed indifference, so as to weigh the evidence in each

case with complete impartiality. The evidence, for instance, for the truth of the Christian religion, it is said, a good man must wish, and ought to wish, to find satisfactory; one who loves and practises virtue, cannot be, and ought not to be, *indifferent* as to the question whether there be or be not a God who will reward it. This objection arises, I conceive, from an indistinct and confused notion of the sense of the terms employed. A candid and unbiassed state of mind, which is sometimes called *indifference* or impartiality, *i. e.* of the *judgment*, does not imply an indifference of the *will*,—an absence of all wish on either side, but merely an absence of all influence of the wishes in forming our decision,—all leaning of the judgment on the side of inclination,—all perversion of the evidence in consequence. That we should *wish* to find truth on one side rather than the other, is in many cases not only unavoidable but commendable; but to *think* that true which we wish, without impartially weighing the evidence on both sides, is undeniably a folly, though a very common one. If a mode of effectual and speedy cure be proposed to a sick man, he cannot but wish that the result of his inquiries concerning it may be

a well-grounded conviction of the safety and efficacy of the remedy prescribed ; it would be no mark of wisdom to be indifferent to the restoration of health ; but if his wishes should lead him (as is frequently the case) to put implicit confidence in the remedy without any just grounds for it, he would deservedly be taxed with folly. Or again, if a scheme be proposed to any one for embarking his capital in some speculation by which he is to gain immense wealth, he will doubtless wish to find that the expectations held out are well-founded ; but we should call him very imprudent, if (as many do) he should suffer this wish to bias his judgment, and should believe, on insufficient grounds, the fair promises held out to him : his wishes, we should say, were both natural and wise ; but since they could not render the event more probable, it was most unwise to allow them to influence his decision. In like manner, (to take the instance above alluded to,) a good man will indeed *wish* to find the evidence of the Christian religion satisfactory, but a wise man will not for that reason *think* it satisfactory, but will weigh the evidence the more carefully on account of the importance of the question.

By confounding together these two very distinct things, *indifference* of the *will*, and indifference of the *judgment*, I have known a person maintain, with some plausibility, the inexpediency, with a view to the attainment of Truth, of educating people or appointing teachers to instruct them in any particular systems or theories, of astronomy, medicine, religion, morals, politics, &c., on the ground that a man must wish to believe and to find good reasons for believing, the system in which he has been trained, and which he has been engaged in teaching; and this wish must prejudice his understanding in favour of it, and consequently render him an incompetent judge of truth.

It would follow from this principle, that no physician should be trusted, who is not utterly indifferent whether his patient recovers or dies; since, else, he must wish to find reasons for hoping favourably from the mode of treatment pursued: no plan for the benefit of the public, proposed by a *philanthropist*, should be listened to; since such a man cannot but wish it may be successful, &c.—No doubt the judgment is often biassed by the inclinations; but it is pos-

sible, and it should be our endeavour, to guard against this bias. And by the way, it is utterly a mistake to suppose that the bias is always *in favour* of the conclusion wished for; it is often in the contrary direction. There is in some minds a tendency to unreasonable doubt in cases where their wishes are strong;—a morbid distrust of evidence which they are especially anxious to find conclusive: *e. g.* Groundless fears for the health or safety of an ardently-beloved child, will frequently, on account of their earnest wish for his welfare, distress anxious parents. Different temperaments (sometimes varying with the state of health of each individual) lead towards these opposite miscalculations. Each of us probably has a natural leaning towards one or the other (often towards *cool* both, at different times) of these infirmities;—the over-estimate, or under-estimate of the reasons in favour of a conclusion we earnestly desire to find true. Our aim should be, not to fly from one extreme to the other, but to avoid both, and to give a verdict according to the evidence; preserving the indifference of the Judgment, even when the Will *cannot*, and indeed *should* not be indifferent.

There are persons, again, (though some of my readers will, perhaps, be disposed to doubt the fact,) who, in supposed compliance with the precept, "lean not to thine own understanding," regard it as a duty to suppress all exercise of the intellectual powers, in every case where the feelings are at variance with the conclusions of reason. They deem it right to consult the heart more than the head; *i. e.* to surrender themselves, advisedly, to the bias of any prejudice that may chance to be present: thus, deliberately and on principle, burying in the earth the talent entrusted to them, and hiding under a bushel the candle that God has lighted up in the mind. But it is not necessary to dwell on such a case, both because it is not, I trust, a common one, and because those who *are* thus disposed, are clearly beyond the reach of argument, since they think it wrong to listen to it.

I am far from recommending presumptuous inquiries into things beyond the reach of our faculties;—attempts to be "wise above what is written;"—or groundless confidence in the certainty of our conclusions: but we cannot even exercise the requisite humility in acquiescing in revealed doctrines, unless we employ our reason

to ascertain what they are; and there is surely at least as much presumption in measuring every thing by our own feelings, fancies, and prejudices, as by our own reasonings.

(4.) Lastly, another objection sometimes brought, not so much against the pursuit, as against the propagation of truth, is, that the minds of many men are incapable of rightly apprehending it; that the attempt to teach some truths to such hearers as are not qualified for receiving them, and to remove some errors which they are not ripe for perceiving to be such, would only excite their disgust towards every thing they might hear from such instructors; or that some might assent to what they heard, while they put the most mischievously false interpretation upon it; or, lastly, that they might misapply even what they had rightly understood; as persons ignorant of medicine often do mischief by administering, without judgment, some powerful remedy whose efficacy they have witnessed. Even thus, it may be said, will the unlearned, when they have been taught to reject some long-established error, proceed, when their minds are once unsettled, to reject well-grounded

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doctrines also; and will apply the arguments by which they have been convinced in one case, to another, perhaps very different, (though they are incapable of understanding that difference,) so as to produce the most erroneous results.

Accordingly, it is urged, our Lord himself and his Apostles abstained from teaching every thing at once to their hearers, because they "were not as yet able to bear them:" and even so important a doctrine as the extension of the Gospel to the Gentile world was not fully made known to the Apostles themselves, for several years after they had received their commission.

All this is, in a certain sense, true; and as far as it is true, is no contradiction of the principle I have laid down, but an application of it. For to teach any thing which, though in itself true, will inevitably be misunderstood by the hearers, is in reality to propagate not truth, but error; and if our teaching has in any case a necessary tendency to lead a certain class of hearers into such mistakes as to other points, as we have no power to guard against, we are not enlightening, but leading them into darkness. If we were to suppose a case (to resort to an illustration I have

elsewhere employed) of our informing a rustic that the sun stands still, while, for some reason or other, we had no means of teaching him that the earth turns round, he would evidently be more perplexed than instructed, and would be more than ever at a loss to understand the alternations of day and night.

To shew that what has here been said was not a statement framed for the occasion, in order to meet objections, I will take the liberty of citing a passage to the same purpose from my Bampton Lectures, published in 1822.—“Persons of inferior powers and attainments may be led, not to knowledge, but to error, by hastily proposing to them such statements and explanations as surpass their capacity: though they may be intelligible and instructive to the abler and more advanced. No vain clamours therefore about deceiving the people,—no groundless charges of keeping the vulgar in ignorance, and preaching a different gospel to different persons, should deter us from following at once the dictates of sound sense, and the example of St. Paul; or induce us so to perplex and confuse “those who are weak in the faith,” as really to incur the

blame of deceiving them, for the sake of avoiding the appearance of it. For it should be remembered that, practically speaking, all truth is relative: that which may be to one man a true statement of any doctrine, may be in effect false, to another, if it be such as cannot but lead him to form false notions; and that which gives him, if not a perfectly correct notion of things as they are, yet the nearest to this that he is capable of, may be regarded as, to him, true.”*

If then, on these principles, we withhold *for a time* some part of the Truth from those who are not yet able to bear it,—if we add “line upon line, and precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little,”—striving gradually to qualify the learner for a more full communication;—if we labour patiently to wear away prejudices by little and little, when the attempt to eradicate them abruptly would be unsuccessful, or pernicious,—we are pursuing that method of inculcating truth which is sanctioned by Christ and his Apostles. But if we make the ignorance, weakness, or prejudice of men a plea for suppressing or disguising truth, or for conniving at error,

* Lect. IV. pp. 119, 120.

without labouring at the same time to remove those obstacles;—if we are content to leave them *permanently* under the influence of delusion,—to postpone, *sine die*, as the phrase is, the communication of religious truths,—to wait *indefinitely* for some unforeseen favourable conjuncture which we make no exertions to bring about,—we are proceeding in direct contradiction to the spirit of the Gospel, and the example of its Author. “I have yet many things,” said he, “to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them *now* ;” but he did, by his Spirit, gradually impart this knowledge to them afterwards; not to some subsequent generation, but to those very same individuals. “I have fed you with milk and not with meat,” says St. Paul, “for ye were not able to bear it; neither *yet* are ye able;” he evidently implies a hope that they (*i. e.* not some future generation, but those very individuals) *will* be able to bear it: nay, he is evidently reproaching them for not being already better qualified for the reception of divine Truth. Indeed the very similitude of *babes*, of itself draws our attention, our hopes, and our endeavours, towards a progressive growth into manhood.

§ 4. When, however, we have made up our minds as to the importance of seeking in every case for truth, with an unprejudiced mind, the greatest difficulty still remains; which arises from the confidence we are apt to feel that we have already done this, and have sought for truth with success. For every one must of course be convinced of the truth of his own opinion, if it be properly called *his* opinion; and yet the variety of men's opinions furnishes a proof how many must be mistaken. If any one then would guard against mistake as far as his intellectual faculties will allow, he must make it, *not the second, but the first question* in each case, "Is this true?" It is not enough to believe what you maintain; you must maintain what you believe; and maintain it *because* you believe it, and that, on the most careful and impartial review of the evidence on both sides. For any one may bring himself to believe almost any thing that he is inclined to believe, and thinks it becoming or expedient to maintain. It makes all the difference, therefore, whether we *begin* or *end* with the enquiry as to the truth of our doctrines. To express the same maxim in other

words, it is one thing to *wish to have Truth on our side*, and another thing to wish sincerely to be *on the side of Truth*. There is no genuine love of truth implied in the former. Truth is a powerful auxiliary, such as every one wishes to have on his side; every one is rejoiced to find, and therefore often succeeds in convincing himself, that the principles he is already disposed to adopt,—the notions he is inclined to defend, may be maintained as true. A determination to “*obey the Truth*,” and to follow wherever she may lead, is not so common. In this consists the genuine love of truth; and this can be realized in practice only by *postponing* all other questions to that which ought ever to come foremost, “What is the Truth?” The minds of most men are *pre-occupied* by some feeling or other which influences their judgment, either on the side of truth or of error, as it may happen, and enlists their learning and ability on the side, whatever it may be, which they are predisposed to adopt.

(1.) One of the most common of these feelings is an aversion to *doubt*;—a dislike of having the judgment kept in suspense: which, combined with indolence in investigation, induces

the great mass of mankind to *make up their minds* on a variety of points, almost according to the first suggestion that is offered. As the illustrious Greek historian expresses it, in language which will hardly admit of an adequate translation, the generality of mankind are so averse to the labour of investigating truth, that they are willing rather to adopt any statement that is ready-prepared for their acceptance.^b But he who would cultivate an habitual devotion to Truth, must be solicitous in the first place to avoid error; and consequently must in all cases prefer *doubt* to the reception of falsehood, or to the admission of any conclusion on insufficient evidence. One who has an aversion to doubt, and is anxious to make up his mind, and to come to *some* conclusion on every question that is discussed, must be content to rest many of his opinions on very slight grounds; since no one individual is competent to investigate fully all disputable points. Such a one, therefore, is no lover of truth; nor is in the right way to attain it on any point. *He* may more reasonably hope

^b Ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀλήθειας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἔτοιμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται.

this, who, though he may on many points perceive some (and perhaps a great) preponderance of probability on this or that side, is contented to come to a decisive conclusion only on those few which he has been enabled thoroughly to investigate.

The fault I have been speaking of, is one which men are the less likely to detect in themselves, from this circumstance; that in many practical cases it is necessary to come to some decision speedily, even though we may not have before us the fullest evidence that we could desire, or even that we might hope, were more time allowed us, to obtain. The physician may be compelled to prescribe, or the general to give his orders, immediately, and without waiting to examine all the reasons on both sides; because delay would be as pernicious as mistake. In cases of this kind, the utmost we can do is to make up our minds according to the best reasons that occur; and though we are not called on, even then, to come to any certain conclusion in our own minds, if there are no grounds for it; yet we must *act* as if we *were* certain. If, in a journey, we have no means of knowing certainly which of two or three roads will lead us aright,

we must yet choose one, because we are certain we cannot reach the journey's end by standing still. So also, if we are in doubt whether thieves will come or not, we bar the door, as if we were certain they would; because to neglect this, would be to stake all on the event of their not coming. In like manner, he who has doubts about the truth of Christianity, is bound in prudence to act as if it were true. For in these, and many other cases of practice, "not to decide, is, to decide." And the habit is often in this manner acquired, of forming our *opinions* as hastily as our practical decisions; and that too, even in cases where no immediate step is necessarily to be taken—no danger, equal to the danger of error, to be incurred by remaining in suspense.

(2.) To that dislike of doubt which has been mentioned as an obstacle to the cultivation of an habitual love of Truth, many others may be added which augment the difficulty. In many it is the desire of *originality*, heightened sometimes into the love of paradox, that pre-occupies the mind. They are zealous for Truth, provided it be some truth, brought to light by themselves.

There are some accordingly, who have been right where prevailing opinions are erroneous; and erroneous, where the rest of the world think rightly. And such persons often satisfy themselves that they are guarded against this excess, by the severity of their judgments on their neighbour's originality,—by unsparing rejection of every paradox, and every novelty, proceeding from another. A *crude* theory or opinion, means, in their language, one which (being new) has not first occurred to themselves.

(3.) Others again, and they are more numerous, are unduly biassed by an excessive respect for venerated authority;—by an undue regard for any belief that is ancient,—that is established,—that has been maintained by eminent men: they are overpowered in short by the “argumentum ad verecundiam.” I mean not, of course, that the judgment of able men, and that of numerous independent authorities, furnishes no valid argument; only, that it should not supersede argument;—that every other description of evidence should be called in;—and that we should not think ourselves bound to adopt an opinion merely because it has been held by many

before us. And some are so biassed by authority, that they not only admit carelessly as true what they have not examined, but even tolerate a considerable admixture of what they themselves perceive to be untrue: "Errare malo cum Platone, quam cum istis vera sentire," implies no uncommon kind of feeling. And besides, any errors which have long and extensively prevailed, are by many regarded as of no great practical consequence; because they think, if they had led to any ill result, it would have been long ago manifest. This is indeed by no means universally the case; for many doctrinal errors do lead to practical evils which are not referred, even by those who perceive them, to the causes whence they sprung. Protestants, for instance, perceive the immoral effects which naturally spring, in popish countries, from the doctrines of purgatory, indulgences, image-worship, &c.; but a sincere Romanist, though he cannot but perceive the existence of many of these immoralities, is usually altogether blind to their connexion with those causes. And the Protestant who wonders at this blindness, is perhaps himself equally blind in some similar case. But

though, as has been said, the alleged harmlessness of long-established errors is in general very rashly inferred, still it commonly *is* inferred; and there are not a few who have more dread of any thing that savours of novelty, even when they perceive nothing objectionable in it, than of what is generally received, even when they know it to be unsound. And hence, he is the most likely to be, by such persons, accounted a safe man, not whose views are on the whole the most reasonable, but who is free from all errors, *except vulgar errors.*

The two faults which have just been noticed, that is, a certain degree of each, are not unfrequently combined. The hasty adoption of striking novelties on some occasions, is not incompatible with a blind adherence to the received doctrine on others. All men have been told that wisdom consists in preserving a middle course between opposite extremes; and the weak, the uncandid, and the unthinking, often congratulate themselves on having attained this happy medium, by the mimic wisdom of sliding alternately into each extreme. True wisdom would tell us not to receive one opinion because it is

old, and another because it is *new*; but to receive and reject none on either ground, and to inquire sedulously in each case what is *true*.

(4.) The greatest, however, of all the obstacles to the habit of following truth, is, the tendency to look in the first instance to the *expedient*. Expediency does not, in reality, stand opposed to Truth, except when made its rival for precedence; but while the genuine lover of truth always regards *that* as the only sure road to the expedient, the generality of men look out *first* for what is expedient, and are contented if they can afterwards reconcile that (which, with a biassed mind, they are very likely to accomplish) with a conviction of truth. And this is the sin which most easily besets those who are engaged in the instruction of others; and it besets them the more easily, inasmuch as the consciousness of falsehood, even if it exist in the outset, will very soon wear away. He who does not begin by preaching what he thoroughly believes, will speedily end by believing what he preaches. His habit of discriminating the true from the false, the well-established from the doubtful, will soon decay for want of assiduous exercise; and

thus inured to the sacrifice of complete sincerity to supposed utility, and accustomed to support true conclusions by *any* premises that offer, he will soon lose, through this faulty practice, even the power of distinguishing what conclusions are true.

§ 5. The temptations to this fault are so great, the occurrence of it so frequent, and the mischief of it so incalculable, that I cannot, perhaps, better close these remarks, than by classing, under a few comprehensive heads, the cautions to be observed in avoiding it.

(1.) First, then, one who would cherish in himself an attachment to truth, must never allow himself either to advance any argument, or to admit and acquiesce in any when advanced by another, which he knows or suspects to be unsound or fallacious; however true the conclusion may be to which it leads,—however convincing the argument may be to those it is addressed to,—and however important it may be that they *should* be convinced. It springs from, and it will foster and increase a want of veneration for truth; it is an affront put on “the Spirit of Truth;”

it is a hiring of the idolatrous Syrians to fight the battles of the Lord God of Israel. And it is on this ground that we should adhere to the most scrupulous fairness of statement and argument: he who believes that sophistry will always in the end prove injurious to the cause supported by it, is probably right in that belief; but if it be for that reason that he abstains from it,—if he avoid fallacy, wholly, or partly, through fear of *detection*; it is plain he is no sincere votary of truth.

(2.) On the same principle, we are bound never to countenance any erroneous opinion, however seemingly beneficial in its results,—to connive at no salutary delusion (as it may appear,) but to open the eyes (when opportunity offers, and in proportion as it offers) of those we are instructing, to any mistake they may labour under; though it may be one which leads them ultimately to a true result, and to one of which apparently they might otherwise fail. The temptation accordingly to depart from this principle is sometimes excessively strong; because it will often be the case that men will be in some danger, in parting with a long admitted

error, of abandoning, at the same time, some truth they have been accustomed to connect with it. Accordingly, I have heard censure passed on the endeavours to enlighten the Roman Catholics, on the ground that many of them had become atheists, and many, the wildest of fanatics. That this should be in some degree the case, is highly probable; it is a natural result of the pernicious effects on the mind of the Roman Catholic system; it is an evil spirit, which we must expect will cruelly rend and mangle the patient as it comes out of him, and will leave him half dead at its departure.

Again: the belief in the plenary inspiration of Scripture,—its being properly and literally the “Word of God,” merely uttered, or committed to writing by the sacred penmen, in the very words supernaturally dictated to them, and the consequent belief in its complete and universal infallibility, not only on religious, but also on historical and philosophical points,—these notions which prevail among a large portion of Christians, are probably encouraged or connived at by very many of those who do not, or at least *did* not originally, in their own hearts, entertain

any such belief. But they dread “the unsettling of men’s minds;” they fear that they would be unable to distinguish what is, and what is not, matter of inspiration; and, consequently, that their reverence for Scripture and for religion altogether would be totally destroyed; while, on the other hand, the error, they urge, is very harmless, leading to no practical evil, but rather to piety of life. And, doubtless, similar feelings in the Romanists had a share in inducing them to retain the Apocrypha in their Bible: many of the learned among them must surely have known, that these books have no title to be considered as part of the Holy Scriptures; “but they are on the whole,” they may have thought, “rather edifying than hurtful; and to reject them might shake men’s faith in the whole of Scripture.” The same reasoning probably operates with many of them, to induce them to maintain the infallibility of the Church,—the authority of Tradition, &c. Indeed, the fault I have been speaking of is of the very essence of Romanism, which is a complete system of “pious frauds.” Would that Protestants did not so readily flatter themselves, that their separation from the *Church* of Rome

exempts them from all danger of errors like hers!

There is a strong temptation again to foster or connive at the popular error of expecting under the Christian dispensation those temporal rewards and punishments which form no part of the system; a mistake which no doubt has often produced partial good results, and which there will often be, and oftener appear to be, danger in removing. Of the same character is the belief that the moral precepts of the Levitical law are binding on Christians; and that the observance of the Lord's day is a duty to which they are bound by the fourth commandment.¹ Though the desired conclusions may in these and similar

¹ Of course, I am not at present alluding to those who, after a full and candid examination, are themselves convinced of this;—whose sincere and deliberate belief is, that the fourth commandment does extend to Christians, but that it is sufficiently obeyed by the observance of the first day of the week instead of the seventh; or that the precise directions of an express command of Scripture, which is admitted to be binding on us, may allowably be altered by the traditions of the Church. Though I cannot but regard such views as erroneous, the error does not belong to the class now under discussion. *See note at the end of Essay V.*

cases be reached by the paths of truth, there will be an apparent, and sometimes a real danger that those who have been long used to act rightly on erroneous principles, may fail of those conclusions, when undeceived. In such cases it requires a thorough love of truth, and a firm reliance on divine support, to adhere steadily to the straight course.

(3.) A like danger will often be our appointed trial in the converse case also;—in firmly resolving to suppress no clearly-revealed gospel-truth, through apprehension of ill consequences. Then only can we be “pure from the blood of all men, if we have not shunned to set before them *all* the counsel of God.” He did indeed, Himself, think fit to hide for many ages, under the veil of the Levitical law, the coming of the Messiah’s kingdom; and it is but a small part probably of the great scheme of redemption that He has as yet imparted to us; but He has not authorized *man* to suppress any part of what He has revealed; and it is an impious presumption even to inquire into the expediency of such a procedure.

(4.) Lastly, as we must not dare to withhold

*Compare this
with art (4)
page 27-*

or disguise revealed *religious* truth, so, we must dread the progress of no *other* truth. We must not imitate the bigotted papists who imprisoned Galileo; and step forward, Bible in hand, (like the profane Israelites carrying the ark of God into the field of battle) to check the inquiries of the geologist, the astronomer, or the political-economist, from an apprehension that the cause of religion can be endangered by them. Any theory on whatever subject, that is really sound, can never be inimical to a religion founded on truth; and any that is unsound may be refuted by arguments drawn from observation and experiment, without calling in the aid of revelation. If we give way to a dread of danger from the inculcation of any scriptural doctrine, or from the progress of physical or moral science, we manifest a want of faith in God's power, or in his will, to maintain his own cause. That we shall indeed best further his cause by fearless perseverance in an open and straight course, I am firmly persuaded; but it is not only when we *perceive* the mischiefs of falsehood and disguise, and the beneficial tendency of fairness and candour, that we are to be followers of truth: the

trial of our faith is, when we *cannot* perceive this: and the part of a lover of truth is to follow her at all seeming hazards, after the example of Him who “came into the world that He might bear witness to the Truth.”

No one, in fact, is capable of fully appreciating the ultimate expediency of a devoted adherence to truth in all that relates to the Christian religion, except the Divine Author of it; because He alone comprehends the whole of that vast and imperfectly-revealed scheme of Providence; and alone can see the inmost recesses of the human heart; and alone can foresee and judge of the remotest consequences of human actions. And much of the good policy of the course I have been recommending, which *can* be perceived by those of more cultivated minds, is beyond the comprehension of a great majority of mankind. The *expediency* of truth can be estimated by few; but its intrinsic loveliness, by all. None are precluded, by want of intellectual power and culture, from that undoubting faith and firm reliance on their great Master, which will lead them to aim at truth, out of veneration to Him;—to reject disguise, and sophistry, and

equivocation, at once, as hateful to Him, without stopping to inquire what further evil they may lead to.

And it is no more than needful that those who act thus *should* have a more than common assurance of his approbation; for they will often fail of that of their fellow men. Besides being occasionally censured as rash and mischievous, they will constantly find a want of sympathy in those (and they, I fear, are a great majority) whose character is, in this point, opposite. They may be valued indeed by many persons for other good qualities; but that zealous thorough-going love of truth which I have been describing, is very seldom admired, or liked, or even understood, except by those who possess it. Courage, liberality, activity, &c. are often highly prized by those who do not possess them in any great degree; but the quality I am speaking of, is, by those deficient in it, either not perceived where it exists, or perceived only as an excess and extravagance.

“There is nothing covered,” however, “that shall not be revealed; nor hid, that shall not be known.” And the genuine and fearless lover of

truth, who has sought, not the praise of men, but the praise of God “who seeth in secret,” shall be “sanctified through his Truth” here, and by Him “be rewarded openly” hereafter.

ESSAY II.

ON THE DIFFICULTIES AND THE VALUE OF THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL GENERALLY.

§ 1. THERE appears to be a very remarkable analogy between the treatment to which Paul was himself exposed during his personal ministry on earth, and that which his works have met with since. In both he stands distinguished in many points among the preachers of the Gospel; and it is possible that this distinction may in some way be connected with the peculiar manner in which he became one of that number.

The same Apostle, who had been originally so bitter a persecutor of the Christians, was exposed, after his conversion, to a greater variety of afflictions in the gospel-cause than any of the others. He not only had to endure a greater amount of persecution than any of the rest from unbelievers,

but was also peculiarly harassed by vexatious opposition, and mortifications of every kind from his Christian brethren. He was not only “in labours more abundant,”—he not only endured a double portion of imprisonments, scourgings, stoning, perils of every kind from the enemies of the Gospel, being specially hated by the Jews on account of his being the Apostle of the Gentiles, the overthrower of the proud distinctions of Israel “after the flesh;” but he was also troubled by the perversity of his own converts; especially such of them as were corrupted by false teachers, who endeavoured to bring them into subjection to the Mosaic law, and laboured to undervalue his claims as a true Apostle, and to rival him in the estimation of his own churches.

It is not unlikely that his Lord *designed* thus to place him foremost in the fight,—thus to assign to him, both the most hazardous, and also the most harassing and distressing offices in the Christian ministry,—on account of his having once been a blasphemer and persecutor. Not as a punishment,—nor again that he might atone and make compensation for his former sin (which no man can do); but that he might

have an opportunity of completely retracing his steps, and of feeling that he did so;—that he might display a zeal, and firmness, and patience, and perseverance, above all the rest, in the cause which he had once oppressed;—that by having his own injurious treatment of Christians continually brought to his mind by what he himself endured, he might the more deeply and deliberately humble himself before God for it;—that he might find room to exercise, in his dealings with unbelievers, all that full knowledge of the perverse prejudices of the human mind, with which his own memory would furnish him, by reflecting on his own case;—and finally, that both he and the other Apostles might feel that he was placed fully on a level with them, notwithstanding his former opposition to the cause; by enduring and accomplishing in it more than all the rest, by suffering more than he had ever inflicted, by forwarding the cause of Truth more than he had ever hindered it, and by bearing with him this pledge that God had fully pardoned him—the pledge of his being counted worthy not only to suffer in his Master's cause, but to suffer more than any other, and with greater effect.

He who had been accessory to the stoning of St. Stephen himself, alone of the Apostles, as far as we know, suffered stoning; he who had been so zealous in behalf of the law of Moses, was destined to encounter not only unbelieving Jews, but those Christians also who laboured to corrupt Christianity by mixing the law of Moses with it; he who had been, as he expresses it, "exceedingly mad against the disciples, and persecuted them even unto strange cities," was himself driven from city to city by enemies whose fury knew no bounds, both of his own countrymen, and of the senseless rabble of idolaters who assailed him like wild beasts at Ephesus. He who had misinterpreted the ancient prophecies respecting the Messiah, and despised his disciples, had to endure not only the contradiction and derision of unbelievers, but also the wilfulness and perversity of false brethren who misrepresented and misinterpreted the doctrines he himself taught, and of arrogant rivals who strove to bring him into disrepute with those who had learnt the faith from him.^a

^a "Here then we have a man of liberal attainments, and in other points of sound judgment, who had addicted his life to the service of the Gospel. We see him, in the prosecution

In all these troubles he was “more than conqueror, through Christ that strengthened” him. of his purpose, travelling from country to country, enduring every species of hardship, encountering every extremity of danger, assaulted by the populace, punished by the magistrates, scourged, beat, stoned, left for dead; expecting, wherever he came, a renewal of the same treatment, and the same dangers, yet, when driven from one city, preaching in the next; spending his whole time in the employment, sacrificing to it his pleasures, his ease, his safety: persisting in this course to old age, unaltered by the experience of perverseness, ingratitude, prejudice, desertion; unsubdued by anxiety, want, labour, persecutions; unwearied by long confinement, undismayed by the prospect of death. Such was St. Paul. We have his letters in our hands; we have also a history purporting to be written by one of his fellow-travellers, and appearing, by a comparison with these letters, certainly to have been written by some person well acquainted with the transactions of his life.” . . . “We also find him positively, and in appropriated terms, asserting that he himself worked miracles, strictly and properly so called, in support of the mission which he executed; the history, meanwhile, recording various passages of his ministry, which come up to the extent of this assertion. The question is, whether falsehood was ever attested by evidence like this. Falsehoods, we know, have found their way into reports, into tradition, into books; but is an example to be met with, of a man voluntarily undertaking a life of want and pain, of incessant fatigue, of continual peril; submitting to the loss of his home and country, to stripes and stoning, to tedious imprisonment, and the constant expectation of a violent death,

Trusting that his Master would enable him to go through the work to which he had been appointed, and would turn even the malice and perversity of men to "the furtherance of the Gospel," he "rejoiced that Christ was preached," even when it was "through envy and strife," by those "who thought to add affliction" to the Apostle's bonds; he exulted in that very bondage, because it was made the means of introducing him to the notice of some among the Romans to whom he might not otherwise have gained access; (Phil. i. 12—18); and at Philippi, when cruelly scourged and imprisoned untried, by the Roman magistrates, he joyfully trusted that Christ would make even this a means of forwarding his cause; which was done in the consequent conversion of the jailor and his family; the germ, probably, of the exemplary church of the Philippians.^b

for the sake of carrying about a story of what was false, and of what, if false, he must have known to be so?"—PALEY'S *Horæ Paulinæ*, pp. 338, 339.

^b The whole narrative of this transaction is particularly affecting from the *strong relief* in which the incidents are set, by the quiet simplicity of the language: "The magistrates rent off their clothes and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast

A like fate seems to attend the writings also which this blessed apostle and martyr left behind him. No part of the Scriptures of the New Testament has been so unjustly neglected by some Christians, and so much perverted by others; over and above the especial hatred of them by infidels and by some descriptions of heretics. Still may Paul be said to stand, in his works, as he did in person while on earth, in the front of the battle; to bear the chief brunt of assailants from the enemies' side, and to be treacherously stabbed by false friends on his own; degraded and vilified by one

them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely; who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sung praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison-doors open, he drew his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"—Acts xvi. 22—30.

class of heretics, perverted and misinterpreted by another, and too often most unduly neglected by those who are regarded as orthodox. And still do his works stand, and will ever stand, as a mighty bulwark of the true Christian faith; he, after having himself “fought the good fight, and finished his course,” has left behind him a monument in his works, whereby “he being dead yet speaketh;” a monument which his Master will guard (even till that day when its author shall receive the “crown of glory laid up for him”) from being overthrown by the assaults of enemies, and from mouldering into decay through the negligence of friends.

§ 2. In order to avoid being misunderstood as to the sense in which this Apostle’s writings have been spoken of as a principal bulwark of gospel-truth, and as to the censure passed on the comparative neglect they sometimes meet with, I must entreat the reader’s attention to some considerations, which, though frequently overlooked in practice, are so obvious when once fairly presented to the mind, that I fear it may be thought trifling to dwell on them.

Of all the ambiguities of language that have ever confused men's thoughts, and thence led to pernicious results in practice, (and unspeakable is the mischief which has thus been done,) there are few, perhaps, that has ever produced more evil than the ambiguity of the word "Gospel." The word, as is well known, signifies, according to its etymology (as well as the Greek term of which it is a translation), "good tidings;" and thence is applied especially to the joyful intelligence of salvation for fallen man through Christ. The same term has come to be applied, naturally enough, to each of the histories which give an account of the life of Him, the Author of that salvation; and thence men are frequently led to seek exclusively, or principally, in those histories, for an account of the *doctrines* of the Christian religion: for where should they look, they may say, for "*Gospel-truth*," but in the "*Gospels*?" And yet it is plain, on a moment's reflection, that whether they are right or wrong in such a practice, this *reason* for it is no more than a play upon words: for no one really supposes that when the Apostles went forth to preach the Gospel, the meaning of that is, that they recited

the histories composed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which were not written till long after; or even that their preaching was confined to the mere narrative of the things there recorded.

In the primary sense of the word Gospel,—the “good-tidings of great joy to all people,” which were first proclaimed [preached] by the Heavenly Messengers to the shepherds, and afterwards by Jesus and his disciples,—in this sense, the writings of the Evangelists do contain nearly the whole of the Gospel; and, as has been just remarked, derived from this their title. Ours is an *historical* religion; not merely connected with, but *founded* on, certain recorded *events*;—the Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection of the Saviour;—the pouring out of his Spirit on the disciples, &c. Strictly speaking, therefore, the Gospel is the annunciation of what God has done for Man: what Man is to do on his part,—the *means* towards the end,—the Christian faith and practice by which he must attain to a share of the proffered blessings,—these are properly *Gospel-doctrine*; but by a natural transition have come to be frequently called, simply, the *Gospel*. It is not necessary however to be curious about

words any further than is necessary to secure us against being misled by them in respect of things. I am indifferent whether the Apostolic Epistles are called a part of the Gospel or not, provided it be but admitted and carefully kept in mind, that they are necessary to direct us how to attain the blessings of the Gospel. An announcement of the existence, and of the miraculous efficacy of a Tree of Life, would be of no benefit to those who were not instructed how to procure and partake of its fruit.

But there is yet another and less obvious ambiguity in the same word: our Lord, while on earth, was employed, together with his disciples, we are told, in preaching "the Gospel of the Kingdom;" *i. e.* the good tidings that "the kingdom of heaven (as He himself expressed it) was *at hand*;" and good tidings these certainly were, to the Jews and others who looked for the Messiah's promised kingdom, (to whom alone he preached) that this kingdom was just about to be established: and since, therefore, Jesus is spoken of as preaching the *Gospel*, many are hence led to look *to his discourses* alone, or principally, as the storehouse of divine truth, to the

neglect of the other Sacred Writings. But the Gospel which Jesus himself preached, was not the same thing with the *Gospel* which he sent forth his Apostles to preach after his resurrection. This may at the first glance appear a paradox; but on a moment's consideration it will seem rather a truism, that the preaching of Jesus and that of the Apostles was not, and could not be, the same; though they were, each, the Gospel. I do not mean, of course, that they were two different systems; much less, at variance with each other; but the one was a part only, and the other a whole; or rather I should say, a *greater* part of that stupendous whole which is not to be entirely revealed to us here on earth,—the stupendous mystery of man's redemption. How, indeed, could our Lord, during his abode on earth, preach fully that scheme of salvation, of which the key-stone had not been laid,—even his meritorious sacrifice as an atonement for sin,—his resurrection from the dead,—and ascension into glory,—when these events had not taken place? He did indeed darkly hint at these events, in his discourses to his disciples (and to them alone) by way of prophecy; but we are told that “the

saying was hid from them, and they comprehended it not, till after that Christ was risen from the dead;" of course, therefore, there was no reason, and no room, for Him to enter into a full discussion of the doctrines dependent on those events. He left them to be enlightened in due time as to the true nature of his kingdom by the gift which he kept in store for them: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He shall guide you into all truth." There would have been no need of this promise, had our Lord's own discourses contained a full account of the Christian faith. But "the Gospel of the Kingdom" which He preached was, that the "kingdom of Heaven was *at hand*," not that it was actually established; which *was* the Gospel preached by his Apostles, after that Christ, "having been made perfect through sufferings," had entered into his kingdom,—had "ascended up on high, and led captive" the oppressor of men, and had "received gifts" to bestow on them. Our Lord's discourses, therefore, while on earth, though they teach, of course, the truth, do not teach, nor could

*gospel
gospel*

have been meant to teach, the *whole* truth, as afterwards revealed to his disciples. They could not, indeed, even consistently with truth, have contained the main part of what the Apostles preached, because that was chiefly founded on events which had not then taken place. What chance then can they have of attaining true Christian knowledge, who shut their eyes to such obvious conclusions as these? who, under that idle plea, the misapplication of the maxim, that “the disciple is not above his master,” confine their attention entirely to the discourses of Christ recorded in the Four Gospels, as containing all necessary truth; and if any thing in the other parts of the Sacred Writings is forced upon their attention, studiously explain it away, and limit its signification at all hazards, so that it may not go one step beyond what is clearly revealed in the works of the Evangelists? As if a man should, in the culture of a fruit-tree, carefully destroy and reject as a spurious excrescence, every part of the fruit which was not fully developed in the blossom that preceded it.

Even if Christ had in person publicly preached after his resurrection, as well as his Apostles, this

plea, that “the disciple is not above his master,” would not have excused the insult offered to Him in the person of his messengers: the insult, I mean, of making the authority He gave them go for just nothing at all; which it does, if they are to be believed, just as far as they coincide with what He himself uttered in person, and no further; since thus far, any one of *us* is to be believed. For the Apostles, who were divinely commissioned by Christ himself, either were inspired by Him with his Spirit, which “led them into all truth,” or they were *not*: if we say that they were not, we make Him a liar, for giving them this commission and this promise, as well as them, for preaching what they did: if they *were* thus divinely authorised, it must follow inevitably that what they said was said by *Him*, and has exactly the same authority as if He had uttered it with his own lips. Even an earthly king expects that a messenger, sent by him with satisfactory credentials and full powers, should receive the same credit for what he says as would be given to himself in person; and would regard it as an unpardonable affront if the message so sent were rejected. “He that heareth you” (said Christ to his Apostles) “heareth me;

and he that *despiseth you, despiseth me*: and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me.”

But in truth, not only is the preaching of the Apostles to be regarded as of divine authority, and therefore not *requiring* confirmation from our Lord's personal discourses, nor submitting to *limitation* by them, but, from the very nature of the case, it is *impossible* that such a complete coincidence should exist between them. I have just above supposed the case of Jesus himself preaching publicly after his resurrection, conjointly with his disciples; but we know that He did *not* do this: He sent them forth to testify of events, and to teach doctrines founded on events, which had not taken place during his personal ministry on earth. It is commonly supposed indeed by ignorant Christians (ignorant, I mean, of what they might learn from the Bible), that Jesus Christ came into the world to preach a true religion: but in fact, He came for no such purpose. He did not come to *make* a revelation, so much as to be the *subject* of a revelation. He was only so far the revealer and teacher of the great doctrines of Christianity, as you might call the sun and planets the discoverers of the Newtonian system of astro-

nomy: He *accomplished* what he left his *Apostles* to testify and to explain; He offered up himself on the cross, that *they* might teach the atoning virtue of his sacrifice: He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, that they might declare the great mystery of his divine and human nature, and preach that faith in Him by which his followers hope to be raised and to reign with Him. The Christian faith is not merely to believe what Christ taught, but to believe *in Him*. As the promised Messiah, a man might believe in him while he was on earth; but *what* the Messiah should be, and that he should be a Redeemer by his *death*, no one did or could understand, till that great work was accomplished; the true nature of the redemption, and of the faith by which we must partake of it, and all the circumstances of the Messiah's spiritual kingdom (which did not exist during his ministry on earth) his Apostles themselves could not collect, even after his departure, from all his former discourses, till they had received inspiration from on high, to enable them to preach the true doctrines of the Gospel. And when they *did* understand this Gospel, they thought it necessary to give an *explanation* of it

in their discourses and in their epistles. Those, therefore, who neglect their inspired preaching, and will learn nothing of Christianity except what they find in the discourses of Jesus, confident that they alone contain the whole truth, are wilfully preferring an imperfect to a more complete revelation, and setting their own judgment above that of the Apostles. It is frightful to think how much they stake on this their supposed superiority;—what consequences of their blind presumption they may have to abide; “professing themselves to be wise they become fools;” and as they despise the teaching of the Holy Ghost who led the Apostles “into all Truth,” is it not to be feared that if they persist in this their rejection of Him, He will give them over to their own vain conceits; and leave those who have turned aside from the “living waters of the Spirit,” to “hew out for themselves broken cisterns that will hold no water?”

The books, then, which we call the Four Gospels, do not, it should always be remembered, contain an account of the christian religion, but, chiefly, memoirs of the life and preparatory teaching of its Founder, who came into the world not

to make a revelation, so much as to be the subject of a revelation;—to announce the glad tidings (gospel) of salvation through Him, but not to give any full description of the *means* by which *we* are to embrace that salvation; and who, at the close of his personal ministry, tells his disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them *now*.” Nor do the Evangelists undertake the task of teaching the christian faith; since they wrote for the express use, not of unbelieving Jews and idolaters, but of Christians who had heard the christian doctrines preached, and then had been regularly instructed (catechised, as the word is in the original) and examined, and, finally, baptized into the faith. Christianity was not (as many are apt to suppose) founded on the Four Gospels, but, on the contrary, the Four Gospels were founded on Christianity; *i. e.* they were written to meet the demand of Christians, who were naturally anxious for something of a regular account of the principal events from which their faith was derived. “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order, a declaration of those things which are *most certainly believed*

among us . . . it seemed good to me also to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou *hast been instructed*."

The book of the Acts of the Apostles contains a history of the progress, but no detail of the preaching, of Christianity. Many of the discourses mentioned as having been delivered, are not themselves recorded: the object and design of the work being (as in the case of the Four Gospels) not to teach Christianity to its readers, who were already Christians, but to give them a history of its propagation.^c

Our chief source, therefore, of instruction, as to the doctrines of the Gospel, must be in the apostolic epistles, which cannot, indeed, be expected to afford a *regular* systematic introduction to Christianity,—an orderly detail of the first rudiments of faith, calculated for the instruction of beginners entirely ignorant of it, since all of them were written to those who were already converts to Christianity; but yet, from the variety of the occasions on which they were composed,

^c See Hinds's "History of the Rise and Early Progress of Christianity," Part II. chap. 2.

and of the persons to whom they were addressed, and from their being purposely designed to convey admonition, instruction, and exhortation as to christian doctrine and practice, (which is not the case with any other part of the Sacred Writings), the apostolic epistles do contain, though scattered irregularly here and there, according to the several occasions, all the great doctrines of the Gospel, as far as it has yet been revealed to men, explained, enforced, repeated, illustrated, in an infinite variety of forms of expression; thus furnishing us with the means, by a careful study of those precious remains, and by a diligent comparison of one passage with another, of attaining sufficient knowledge of all necessary truth, and of becoming “wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.”^d

^d To the Scriptures therefore was assigned the office of *proving*, but to the *Church*, that of systematically *teaching*, the Christian doctrines. [See Dr. Hawkins’s excellent little work on Tradition.] This circumstance seems to me to afford a powerful evidence of Christianity. That both the Apostles themselves, and the Elders and other Ministers immediately appointed and instructed by them, should have abstained from transmitting to us, in writing, any catechism (such as they must have been in the habit of employing

The most precious part of this treasure we have from the pen of the Apostle Paul ; he being

orally)—any course of elementary instruction in Christianity, consisting of a regular series of unquestionable credenda,—articles of faith duly explained and developed,—this, which must appear to any one, on a moment's reflection, something remarkable, strikes me as literally *miraculous*. I mean, that the procedure appears to me dictated by a wisdom more than human ; and, that the Apostles and their immediate followers must have been *supernaturally* withheld from taking a course which would *naturally* appear to them the most expedient. Thus much at least appears to me indubitable ; that impostors would have taken sedulous care (as Mahomet did) to set forth a complete course of instructions in their faith ; and that enthusiasts would never have failed, *some* of them at least, to fall into the same plan ; so that an omission which is, on all human principles, utterly unaccountable, amounts to a moral demonstration of the divine origin of our religion.

And let it be remembered, that this is not an argument drawn from the *wisdom* of such an appointment : it holds good equally, however little we may perceive the expediency of the course actually pursued ; for *that which cannot have come from man, must have come from God*. If the Apostles were neither enthusiasts nor impostors, they must have been inspired ; whether we can understand or not the reasons of the procedure which the Holy Spirit dictated.

But in this case, attentive consideration may explain to us those reasons. God's wisdom doubtless designed to guard us against a danger, which I think no *human* wisdom would

the author of the far greater part of the Epistles, (about five-sixths of the whole), and also fur-

have foreseen,—the danger of indolently assenting to, and committing to memory, a “form of sound words;” which would in a short time have become no more than a form of words;—received with passive reverence, and scrupulously retained in the mind, leaving no room for doubt,—furnishing no call for vigilant investigation,—affording no stimulus to the attention, and making no vivid impression on the heart. It is only when the understanding is kept on the stretch by the diligent search,—the watchful observation,—the careful deduction, which the christian Scriptures call forth, by their oblique, incidental, and irregular mode of conveying the knowledge of christian doctrines,—it is then only, that the feelings, and the moral portion of our nature, are kept so awake as to receive the requisite impression; and it is thus accordingly, that Divine Wisdom has provided for our wants, “*curis acuens mortalia corda.*”

Moreover, a single systematic course of instruction, carrying with it divine authority, would have superseded the framing of any others;—nay, would have made even the alteration of a single word, of what would, on this supposition, have been *sacred*, appear an impious presumption, and yet could not possibly have been well adapted for all the varieties of station, sex, age, intellectual power, education, taste, and habits of thought. So that there would have been an almost inevitable danger that such an authoritative list of credenda would have been regarded by a large proportion of Christians with a blind and unthinking reverence, which would have exerted no influence on the character; they

nishing even a greater variety still of instruction than in proportion to this amount, on account of the variety of the times, and circumstances, and occasions, which produced them, and of the persons to whom they were written :—individuals and entire churches ; Jews and Gentiles ; converts of his own making, and strangers to his person ; European and Asiatic ; sound and zealous Christians, and the negligent or misguided. The same faith is taught to all ; the same duties enforced on all ; but various points of faith and of practice are dwelt on in each, according to the several occasions. This very thing, however,—the variety of the circumstances, the temporary and local allusions, and, in short, the thorough, earnest, business-like style of his letters,—cannot but increase the difficulty, in some places, of ascertaining the writer's meaning ; and those who are too indolent to give themselves any trouble on the subject, shelter themselves under the remark of the Apostle Peter, that the Epistles of Paul contain “ things would have had “ a form of godliness ; but, denying the power thereof,” the form itself would have remained with them only as the corpse of departed religion.

hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned wrest to their own destruction." Unlearned, *i. e.* not in systems of human philosophy, but in the truths revealed in the Bible. No doubt his writings *do* contain "things hard to be understood," but that is a reason why Christians should take the more pains to understand them, and why those who are commissioned by the chief Shepherd for that purpose, should the more diligently explain them to their flocks.

Nay, but his doctrines, it seems, are not only *difficult*, but *dangerous* also, and, therefore, had better be kept out of sight, lest the unlearned should not only fail to understand them, but should "wrest them to their own destruction." Then let us throw aside the whole Bible at once, and invent a safe religion of our own; for hear but Peter's words:—"which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also *the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction." So that if this inference is to be drawn at all, from the danger to the unlearned of wresting doctrines to their own destruction; if to avoid the danger of misinterpretation, we are to seal up the book

which contains them, the book so sealed up must be the Bible.

Dangerous indeed! yes, most good things are dangerous; and the more, in proportion to their excellence; to those “who are unlearned, and unstable;” *i. e.* who will not learn how to use them aright, and who are unstable,—unsteady in giving their attention to gain right knowledge, and to apply it in practice. Meat and drink are dangerous; for what multitudes fall a sacrifice to intemperance! Shall we then resolve to perish with famine, and let our children starve around us, lest we and they should thus wrest to our destruction the good gifts of God? Shall the pastors, who are commissioned to feed Christ’s flock, shut them out from the principal pasture designed for their use, lest they should stray beyond its bounds, or come to some harm there? What are Christian ministers appointed for, but to instruct the people in the Scriptures,—to explain to them those Scriptures,—and to warn them against the errors arising from the wresting and perverting of God’s word? Ill would they perform their office should they dare to mutilate God’s word, by leaving out every

thing that is “hard to be understood,” to save themselves the trouble of interpreting it ;—should they seek to preserve their hearers from the danger attendant on the Gospel truths, by omitting to “declare to them *all* the counsel of God.”

And, after all, no such security as is sought can ever be found ; where there is true coin, there will always be counterfeit in circulation ;—there is no truth in the world that has not some error very much resembling it : there is no virtue but there is a corresponding vice that apes its appearance : there is no right principle, in Scripture or any where else, that may not by the unlearned be “wrested to their own destruction.” Some *will* do this with the truths of Scripture, in spite of all our care ; but there is this difference ; that he who studies and leads others to study the whole word of God, as his inspired servants have left it, have at least good reason to hope, that he and they, *may*, through God’s Spirit, attain truth without error ; whereas he who confines himself to a part of the Scriptures, and that too, a part which (it is plain from what has been just said) *cannot* contain the whole truth of the Gospel, and who wilfully disregards the teaching of him

whose "Gospel was not after man; neither received of man, nor taught, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ;" such an one is *sure* to be wrong, and to lead others wrong if they are guided by him: and he is fully answerable both for his own errors and for theirs: he makes the experiment at his own peril; and on his own head must be the inevitable consequence of rejecting an acknowledged revelation of Jesus Christ.

And he must also bear the blame even of the errors into which *others* may lead his hearers. If they chance to listen to some wild antinomian fanatic, who cites perpetually texts from Paul, which they have never heard differently explained, how can it be expected that they should perceive and avoid the error? They know that Paul's writings are admitted as canonical and inspired; and they have not been taught that his language will bear any other interpretation than what they hear given; and the silence of their own pastor on the subject will have afforded them a presumption that he can suggest no other interpretation. And thus the wolf will scatter and devour the flock which their shepherd has forsaken.

It is not, however, on the *dangers* to be apprehended from such a procedure, and the *expediency* of an opposite course, that I wish principally to dwell. I would rather advert to the principles laid down in the preceding Essay. Supposing we were in any case quite sure^e that no fanatical sectaries would arise to take advantage of our omission or neglect of this Apostle's writings, should we then be justified in thus guarding against apprehended evils by keeping out of sight the instructions he was commissioned by his Master to deliver?—in taking such liberties with the Gospel as to modify and fashion it according to our views, and virtually to expunge from the record of God's revelations what we chance to think unnecessary? Have we a right, in short, even to entertain the question concerning expediency, instead of considering simply what is the *Truth* as declared by divine inspiration, and resolving, at all events, to follow the truth?

^e This is the remark, almost verbatim, of an eminent divine (now occupying a high station in the church) in a conversation with the author, on the subject of the present Essay.

§ 3. It is necessary to observe, however, that there is a way of evading the force of all that has been hitherto urged;—a plan which certainly may be, and I fear in some instances has been, resorted to, for nullifying in effect, without professing to oppose, every argument that has been adduced. And it is this: to extol Paul's writings, and exhort men to the diligent study of them; urging at the same time (what no one can deny) the importance of interpreting them rightly, and insisting on a preliminary course of study, without which no one is even to enter on the perusal of them; and then to make this preparation consist in a thorough acquaintance with such a list of books, as even those professionally devoted to theological pursuits cannot be expected to master without the assiduous labour of several years. No plan could be devised more effectual (were it generally adopted) for making Paul's epistles a sealed book to all but about one in ten thousand of the christian world. For supposing even all the Clergy, nay, even all candidates for ordination, to have gone through this preparatory course of study, the same could not be expected of the laity, except a small portion of the

educated classes. And the benefits, whatever they might be, of this preparation, would, after all, be confined to those few who had gone through it. They indeed, if they were careful not even to open these epistles till their minds were sufficiently biassed by a great mass of human commentaries and disquisitions, would doubtless be prepared to understand them very differently from what they would have done on another system: whether better or worse is not now the question: but they would not after all be qualified to expound this writer to their flocks, nor authorized to recommend the perusal of him; for these would be, by hypothesis, unfit to enter on the study of his epistles, or to comprehend any exposition of them. And if the principle were consistently followed up, it would soon be remarked that the mass of unlearned Christians are not duly prepared for the thorough comprehension even of *the rest* of Scripture; so that we should speedily arrive at the very point so earnestly contended for by the Papists against the Reformers; viz. the inexpediency of putting the Scriptures into the hands of the people, and the necessity of leaving them to be instructed by

their pastors in whatever things these should judge most profitable for them, and level to their capacities.

If these principles be correct, then, it is false to say that the Christian Religion was designed, or at least, is *adapted* to be that of the mass of mankind. Some, who say that it is so, (while they ridicule the idea of instructing the lower orders in the Evidences and peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel) mean no more than this; that it is possible for a clown to *practise* honesty, temperance, and other virtues which Christianity inculcates. But it would be thought strange to attribute an acquaintance with *mechanics* to savages, and to brutes, on the ground that they employ the lever,—keep the centre of gravity in the right situation, and accommodate their movements to mechanical principles, of which principles they know nothing. If Christianity were designed for the People, it must have been designed that their *motives* should be Christian faith and Christian hope, and that they should be able “to give a reason of the hope that is in them.”

Am I then contending, or did the Reformers

mean to contend, that either Paul's epistles, or the rest of the Scriptures, can be as well understood by a clown or a child as by the most learned theologian? Surely not. The highest abilities, improved by the most laborious study, are not more than sufficient for the full comprehension of the Sacred Books; but, if on this ground they are not to be opened by any who are not so qualified, who will ever *become* thus qualified? If a number of books be pointed out, without a knowledge of which the apostolic epistles cannot be fully understood, it may probably be added with equal truth, that these books cannot be rightly understood without a knowledge of those epistles. If we are to begin at all, we must begin somewhere; and we must, of course, begin in imperfection. Else it might be said, that since veteran soldiers are alone well fitted to perform their part, therefore none but veterans should be brought into the field. The obvious and honest way of proceeding is, not to postpone altogether the study of any part of Scripture till we are qualified for the full comprehension of it; which on such a plan we never should be, since our minds would be pre-occupied with

human expositions; but to study both the Scriptures, and the best helps towards their explanation we can obtain, simultaneously; at the same time carefully guarding ourselves against arrogantly supposing that we do perfectly understand any thing at the first glance. It is to this arrogant disposition that the Scriptures are dangerous. "A little learning" is the utmost that the generality can attain;—it is what *all* must attain before they can arrive at great learning;—it is the utmost acquisition of those who know the most, in comparison of what they do *not* know. "A little learning" is then only (and then always) "a dangerous thing," when we overrate it, and are not aware of its littleness.

On the sources of some of the principal errors which have sprung from the misinterpretation of this Apostle's writings, and the means of guarding even ordinary Christians against them, I propose to offer some more particular remarks in some of the following Essays.

For all that has been here urged I should be glad to think that there is little occasion. To offer proofs of the existence of the error in question,—such proofs as *might* be offered, is

what could not be done with propriety. Some of my readers may, perhaps, regard me as combating a shadow, from having themselves never met with that depreciation of Paul's epistles, which I have been deprecating. I have only to hope they never may: but I fear that on inquiry they will find it but too prevalent;—that they will even meet with some who have gone the length of proposing that no part of the Scriptures should be printed for circulation among the mass of the people, except the Four Gospels: on the ground that *they* contain all things needful, and that the “things hard to be understood” in the Epistles would serve only to perplex and mislead them. A man who gives utterance to such an opinion, we may be sure, entertains it; but how can we be sure that all those who do *not* give it utterance are strangers to it?

§ 4. There is good reason, however, to believe that the chief objection to Paul's writings is not from the things *hard* to be understood which they contain, but from the things *easy* to be understood;—the doctrines so *plainly* taught by him, that “by grace we are saved,”—“that the

wages of sin is death,"—"but eternal life is the *gift* of God through Jesus Christ;"—that our most perfect righteousness can never entitle us to claim reward at the hands of God, nor our own unaided strength enable us to practise that righteousness; but that the meritorious sacrifice of Christ is the only foundation of the Christian's hope, and the aid of his Spirit the only support of the Christian's virtue. These are doctrines humbling to the pride of the human heart, and unacceptable to the natural man; and *therefore* they are rejected by many, as leading to immoral life, and as favouring the notion that we may "continue in sin that grace may abound;" though the moral precepts of this very Apostle in every page, and his enforcement of a conformity to them, as indispensable to the Christian's acceptance with God, fly in the face of every one who dares thus to wrest these Scriptures to his own destruction.

But the dislike shewn to the Apostle's writings by those, who on these grounds decry him, is a proof, if *he* was *inspired*, and *they* uninspired, not that *he* is wrong, but that *they* are. If the Gospel is against a man, he will be against the

Gospel. And the more any work is depreciated by those who are resolved to believe only just what they please, the higher ought its value to rise in the estimation of those who are willing to "obey the truth." Now there is no one of the Sacred Writers whose expressions have been so tortured, whose authority has been so much set at nought, as Paul's, by those who reject many of the most characteristic doctrines of the Gospel; which is a plain proof that they find him a formidable opponent; and which should lead those who prize the purity of the Gospel, to value his writings the more. I am far from insinuating that the great truths of Christianity,—the doctrines of the divinity of our blessed Lord,—of his atoning sacrifice,—and of salvation through Him,—rest on this Apostle's authority alone; but a presumption is afforded, by the very hostility shewn towards him by the opponents of those doctrines, that he is particularly full and clear in enforcing them, and that he

¹ The Mahometans, who acknowledge the authority of the four Gospels, though they pretend the Christians have interpolated them, hold the name of Paul in detestation.

adds great confirmation to the testimony in their favour of the other Sacred Writers.

It is perhaps to be wished, accordingly, that those who, without professing to reject Christianity, have avowedly laboured to disparage this Apostle, and to represent him as at variance with his Master, had written with more ability, and had attracted more notice; in order that they might have directed men's attention more strongly, not only to Paul's claims to a divine commission, but also to his importance as a bulwark of the christian faith. And I wish also that some of them had set forth more strongly the alleged discrepancy between Paul's doctrines and those of the discourses of Jesus; which certainly might have been done; since (as was above remarked), though there is nothing *contrary* in the one to the other, there *is* much that is *different*, as the nature of the case required; the same doctrines which were but obscurely hinted at by the one, being fully developed, (the fit time being come) and earnestly dwelt on, by the other; the doctrines which Jesus preached being suited to the period where the kingdom of Heaven was only *at hand*, and preparatory

to the fuller manifestation of Gospel truth which He revealed to the Apostle Paul when his kingdom was *established*. The attention which a powerful opponent would thus have called to a most important subject, too often neglected by the advocates of our faith, and the light which would in consequence have been thrown on the subject, would have been no small benefit to the cause of truth. Opposition excites discussion ; and discussion leads to inquiries which may end in not only bringing truth to light, but impressing it forcibly on minds which had been sunk in heedless apathy. Next, after an able, and full, and interesting vindication and explanation of Paul's writings, the sort of work whose appearance ought most to be hailed, is a plausible attack on them : which, indeed, is the most likely to call forth the other. His labours can never be effectually frustrated except by being kept out of sight : whatever brings him into notice will, ultimately, bring him into triumph ; all the malignity and the sophistry of his adversaries will not only assail him in vain, but will lead in the end to the perfecting of his glory, and the extension of his Gospel. They may scourge him

uncondemned, like the Roman magistrates at Philippi;—they may inflict on him the lashes of calumnious censure, — but they cannot silence him: they may thrust him into a dungeon, and fetter him with their strained interpretations; but his voice will be raised, even at the midnight of unchristian darkness, and will be heard effectually; his prison doors will burst open as with an earthquake, and the fetters will fall from his hands; and even strangers to Gospel-truth will fall down at the feet of him, even Paul, to make that momentous inquiry, “What shall I do to be saved?”

May God “grant (as the prayer of our Church expresses it) that as the light of the Gospel has been caused to shine through the preaching of that blessed Apostle, we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness for the same, by following the holy doctrines which he taught, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

ESSAY III.

ON ELECTION.

WE learn, from the most undeniable authority, that the writings of the blessed Apostle Paul, contain some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as well as the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Now as it is evidently of the highest importance to guard against such a danger, so it is not less evident (as has been formerly remarked) that this is not to be done by keeping in the back-ground these Epistles, and withdrawing, or encouraging Christians to withhold, attention from them; not only because it is neither wise nor pious to neglect the instructions of one who "received not his doctrine from men, but by inspiration of Jesus Christ;" but also, because the very errors in question will be the more easily propagated by such as appeal to

him in support of them, in proportion as they are allowed to make this appeal uncontradicted; if, while we admit the divine authority of these works, we leave them chiefly in the hands of extravagant fanatics, to put their own interpretation on passages, of which their hearers shall have been taught no better explanation. The christian instruction, in short, to be derived from a right interpretation of this Apostle's works, and the mischief resulting from a misinterpretation of them, furnish, each, a most powerful reason for the attentive study of them.

I propose, accordingly, to suggest some principles which should be kept in mind by one who would rightly understand this portion of Scripture; principles, the neglect of which has given occasion to most of the errors into which "the unlearned and unstable" have fallen.

§ 1. It is evident that, in order to understand any author thoroughly, it is highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to be acquainted, in some degree, with his character; the circumstances in which he was placed; and his habitual modes of thought thence resulting. Nor will

this be sufficient, unless we have something of the same knowledge respecting the persons to whom he wrote. And the more remote any work is, in point of time or of place, from ourselves, the more diligent attention will be required in the reader, not only to ascertain these circumstances, but to keep them steadily and constantly in view. Many things have an *obvious* reference to particular persons, times, and places, and cannot be at all understood without taking these into consideration. When Moses, for instance, or the other sacred writers, speak of places "beyond Jordan," or "on this side of Jordan," every one perceives the necessity of considering the local situation of the author; but many other circumstances, not at all less essential to the right understanding of what is said, are apt to escape the notice of one whose attention is not steadily directed to the application of the principle laid down.

Now no one is ignorant that Paul was not only a Jew, but one strictly educated in the principles of the most learned and most rigid sect among the Jews; but this circumstance is not always practically kept in mind so much as it ought to be. No one who reads his works ought

to lose sight of it for a moment, but constantly to bear in mind what habits of thought and modes of expression would be natural to a Jew, and to a Jew of that description.

Inspired, indeed, he was, with the knowledge of the Gospel; Jewish *errors* and *prejudices* were corrected in him by the Spirit of Truth; but we have no reason to suppose that this inspiration would go any further than was requisite to qualify him for his ministry; that any thing *besides* errors and prejudices would be altered.

If any one should imagine, that because one and the same Spirit taught one and the same Gospel to all its appointed ministers, therefore every distinction between them was done away, all traces of individual character necessarily swallowed up in one common revelation, an attentive study of the Sacred Writers will soon convince him of his mistake. Even of the Apostles, who were all of them Jews, no two write precisely alike; the variations of *individual* character are perceptible, even when in *national* character they all agree.*

* On this point I have treated more at large in the Bampton Lectures. Lect. IV. pp. 124—128.

The Apostle Paul's writings, then, must be studied as those of a man, not only acquainted with the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but familiar with them from a child : full of an early-implanted and habitual reverence for them ; and disposed to refer to them for argument and for illustration, on every possible occasion. He was likely, in short, to write as a learned and zealous Jew, in every point except those in which the teaching of the Spirit led him to correct his former notions. And this divine monitor, it should be recollected, was so far from instructing Christian ministers to keep the Old Testament out of sight, that there is no point more strenuously and uniformly insisted on, than the connexion of the old and new dispensations. Christianity is invariably represented, not as a new religion, but as the completion of a scheme long before begun ; it was plainly meant to be engrafted, not on natural religion, but on Judaism. If this circumstance had been duly attended to, many of the heresies which have corrupted our religion would have been avoided.

But what were the character and situation of this Apostle's *hearers* ? He was, indeed,

more especially the Apostle of the Gentiles; but he appears, wherever he went, to have addressed himself first to his own countrymen; his natural feelings of warm attachment and partiality towards them, being by no means forbidden by his heavenly Guide, who, on the contrary, designed that the Jews should have this precedence. The promises and threats of the Gospel were to be declared "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." "It was *necessary*," says he, "that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, lo! we turn to the Gentiles." It is probable, indeed, that the number of Paul's converts among his own brethren was, in most places, but a small proportion; though in some of the churches it appears, from several circumstances, that their amount was not inconsiderable; and in every church, it is probable that Jews and devout Greeks (*i. e.* such as had before renounced idolatry and acknowledged the divine origin of the Jewish religion) were to be found among the members, and among the earliest members. In those places, however, in which the great majority of the Christian brethren

were converted Gentiles, it might have been supposed that the Old Testament would have been but little studied or thought of; so far however was this from being the case—so far was Paul from allowing the Jewish Scriptures, those Holy Scriptures which he represents as “able to make us wise unto salvation,” to be depreciated, or the Christian revelation to be regarded as any other than a completion of the Mosaic, that he seems to have expected in all his converts, an intimate acquaintance with the Old Testament; and to have earnestly, and not unsuccessfully, inculcated the necessity of interpreting the one scheme by the other, as two parts of the same great whole, and of considering “whatsoever things were written aforetime,” as “written for their learning.” On the Corinthian Church, for instance, he impresses this principle as of high importance; and though but a small proportion of them probably were Jews, he evidently implies that they were not on that account the less interested in all the concerns of the Jewish Church, whose successor was the Christian:—“I would not have you ignorant,” says he, “how that all

our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea..... But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." And after touching on several points in the history of the Church of Israel, he assures the Corinthians that these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come;" *i. e.* who live under the last dispensation of God; which is not, like the Mosaic, to be succeeded by any other, but will last to the end of the world.

The passage just mentioned is only one out of many in which the Apostle adverts to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, as of high importance to be studied by Christians. And the frequent *allusions* he makes to them as *familiar* to his hearers, and of acknowledged value in their eyes, convey his judgment on the subject far more strongly than so many direct admonitions on the subject; they indicate what was the early, the habitual, and the universal mode of instruction employed by

himself and all the Christian teachers. No Christian, therefore, who would copy the pattern of the divine teacher, would leave the Old Testament out of sight; but will learn from him that the former dispensation must be carefully attended to by one who would rightly understand the Gospel. And attention to the same pattern may also serve to guard us against another error, in some respects the opposite of that just alluded to; the confounding together of the two systems in one confused medley, and blending the Law which had "a shadow of good things to come," with the Gospel, which is the fulfilment of it: an error not uncommon with those who unthinkingly study the Bible as one book, without taking pains to discriminate the several parts of the great scheme of Providence it relates to. The two dispensations *correspond* in almost every point, but *coincide* in very few. Like the Flower and the Fruit of any plant, the one is a preparation for the other; and each of its parts bears some *relation* to the other, though they have but a very faint *resemblance*; the parts which are the most prominent and striking in each, respectively, being least so in the other; so that

if any one were to give a representation in which the parts of the blossom and of the perfect fruit were confusedly combined and intermingled, it would be an unnatural anomaly, very unlike either the one or the other. The example of the Apostle's teaching furnishes, as I have said, a safeguard against this error; he all along represents the Law as connected with the Gospel, as the shadow with the substance;—as “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;” and the condition of the Israelites as *analogous* to that of Christians, but in many points dissimilar.

In several instances indeed, this correspondence and this difference are pretty generally perceived and acknowledged. That the paschal lamb, for instance, and the other Jewish sacrifices, were typical of the atoning sacrifice of the true Lamb of God,—the sin-offerings and other outward rites of purification having the same relation to ceremonial offences, and external legal justification from them, that the offering of our Lord has, to the wiping away of moral guilt, and the inward sanctification of the heart,—this is a point on which few professed Christians are ignorant or doubtful; the *correspondence*,

and, at the same time, dissimilarity, having been explicitly stated, in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” That the promised land of Canaan, again, the place of rest to which Jesus (Joshua) conducted the Israelites, is a type of the heavenly rest to which *our* Jesus is ready to lead his followers, is understood and admitted by most Christians. That the sanction of extraordinary temporal blessings and judgments, both national and individual, under which the Jews lived, is withdrawn, and succeeded by “the bringing in of a better hope” than that of the Law, is a truth not so well understood by many Christians; there is a leaning in the minds of not a few, to an expectation of that inevitable vengeance in this world on the wicked, which was denounced under the Mosaic law; and of that temporal prosperity, as the reward of obedience, which forms no part of the promises of

a religion whose Founder was crucified, and whose Apostles were, “if in this life only they had hope in Christ, of all men most miserable.”

The better-instructed part, however, of the Christian world perceive the distinction in this point between the old and the new dispensations; and understand that the promises and threats of the one are applicable, figuratively only, to the other; the rewards and punishments of a future life being substituted for those of the present. There are many other points, however, which are frequently overlooked, in which the correspondence between the two systems is such as to make the former a most useful interpreter of the latter: and when we consider what a familiar acquaintance with the Law, and with the history of the Jews, Paul had himself, and expected in his hearers, we cannot doubt that this interpreter must be perpetually consulted, if we would rightly understand his epistles.

§ 2. One only of the cases to which this principle may be applied will be noticed in the present Essay. A question, which is one of the most momentous ever agitated among Christians, may

be, I think, completely set at rest by such a mode of consulting the Old Testament as has been recommended. The question I allude to, is that relating to such as are called by this Apostle and by the rest, the "*Elect*" or "*chosen people*" of God, "*called, out of the world, to be Saints,*" and inheritors of eternal life, by God's favour (or grace) through Christ. It is well known that differences of no trifling moment exist among Christians in their opinions on this subject. Some maintain, as is well known, that there are among the members of Christ's visible Church, two classes of persons, the Elect and the Non-elect, who are both fixed upon arbitrarily by God's eternal, immutable, unconditional decree;—that those who are the Elect, the "*called to be Saints,*" are regenerate, and made sons of God by his Spirit,—are justified in his sight through the merits of Christ,—are sanctified and led in the paths of Christian holiness by the influence of divine grace, and are infallibly conducted to eternal happiness in heaven: and that others on the contrary, *i. e.* all others, though baptized into the faith, and though they have heard the offers of the Gospel, are nevertheless non-elect, passed by, and rejected

by God ; and consequently, are no less certainly doomed to everlasting perdition.

This account of the Gospel-scheme is utterly displeasing to others ; who maintain that the election in question is *not arbitrary*, but has respect to men's *foreseen faith and obedience* ;^b *i. e.* that God decrees to elect such as He foresees

^b “ Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God,” is an expression sometimes appealed to in support of this view, but I think not correctly. The Apostle's design in employing it will be found, on attentive inquiry, to be this : it was a stumbling-block to the Jews, even to those who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, that the Gentiles should be admitted to equal privileges with themselves : the Israelites, they pleaded, had been declared to be God's peculiar and highly-favoured people ; was it to be supposed that He would *alter* his plans ? No, said Paul ; there is no change in his plans ; but He all along designed (and he cites the prophets to prove his assertion) to admit, at a future time, such of the Gentiles as would hear his call, into the number of his people : this, indeed, was formerly a secret, not understood by our forefathers, and now for the first time “ made manifest” to men ; but the design always existed “ that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs ;” the *mystery* (*i. e.* the doctrine first hidden, and afterwards revealed, which is the usual sense of the word mystery) of their election, was, of course, always *known* to God himself, though but lately revealed to us : they are “ Elect according to the *foreknowledge* of God.”

will be obedient to his commands, and passes by those whose disobedience He foresees.

No candid and well informed student of Scripture, can, I think, deny, that arguments in support of each of these opposite doctrines have been alleged, which have at least some degree of plausibility at first sight.

In support of the latter system, are urged the declarations in Scripture that "Christ died for all," that "He willeth all men to be saved," &c. as well as the general tenour of the Gospel offers of salvation, which seem to leave all that heard them at full liberty to accept or reject them. On the other hand, the expressions of Paul especially are urged, who speaks of men as "clay in the hands of the potter," who has power to make "of the same lump, vessels to honour, and to dishonour" (*i. e.* to humbler and meaner uses); and who speaks of the call to salvation as originating entirely in the free bounty of God, without reference to good works of ours either previous or subsequent: God hath chosen us, says Calvin, "non quia eramus, sed ut essemus sancti;" —not because we *were*, nor because He foresaw that we *should* be, but (according to Paul) in

order that we *might* be holy in all good works."

It would be tedious and unnecessary to cite all the texts that have been appealed to by both parties on this question, and the arguments grounded on them. Suffice it to observe, that they are generally opposed by *other* arguments and *other* texts; and that each party has generally succeeded better in this, than in refuting and explaining those adduced by their opponents. In particular, the explanations given by the opponents of the Calvinistic scheme, of the passages urged in favour of it, appear to some even of themselves, (I will not say unsatisfactory, but) so far incapable of being satisfactorily laid before the mass of ordinary Christians, that they are disposed to apprehend danger from the study of Paul's epistles, and rather to draw the attention of their flocks to other parts of Scripture in preference.

I cannot but think that an attentive examination of the Old Testament will go far towards furnishing a key to the true meaning of Paul's and the other Apostolic epistles; and will furnish an answer, not only satisfactory, but capable of

being made clear to the unlearned, of the three great questions on which the whole discussion turns; viz. 1st, Whether the divine election is *arbitrary*, or has respect to men's foreseen conduct; 2dly, *Who* are to be regarded as the Elect; and, 3dly, In *what* does that Election consist?

In treating of these questions, it should be premised that I design, in the first instance, to look exclusively to the testimony of Scripture; leaving wholly, at present, the abstract questions respecting Fate and Free-will, which belong more properly to the province of natural-religion, or of metaphysics; and also that my examination of Scripture will be confined to the light thrown generally on the Gospel-scheme by the books of Moses. The Christian Church being confessedly the successor of the Jewish, and the Christian dispensation, of the Mosaic, nothing can be more reasonable than to aid our judgment respecting the one by contemplating the other.

§ 3. Now, with respect to the first question before us, were the Israelites, who were

evidently God's Called, Elect, or Chosen, Holy and Peculiar people, were they, I say, thus chosen, arbitrarily, or not? Moses clearly and repeatedly states that this selection of them was arbitrary. He often reminds them that they were not thus singled out from the midst of other nations for their own righteousness, since they were a stiff-necked people, but of God's free goodness, "who will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will be gracious to whom He will be gracious;" and "because He had a favour unto them." And with respect to their fathers, though Abraham indeed was tried, and found faithful and obedient, there was certainly an arbitrary choice made of Jacob in preference to his elder brother Esau; which, indeed, is one of the cases referred to by the Apostle, who remarks, that, "while the children were yet in the womb, and had done neither good nor evil," it was declared by the oracle of God, that "the elder should serve the younger." Nor again (it should be observed) could that selection of the children of Jacob have been decreed with reference to their foreseen faith and obedience; since we know how

eminently deficient they were in those qualifications; stubborn and rebellious,—continually falling into idolatry and other sins,—forgetting what great things God had wrought for them, and undervaluing their high privilege.

The divine election then under the old dispensation was, it is manifest, entirely arbitrary; but, in the second place, *who* were the objects of it? Evidently *the whole nation* without any exception. They were *all* brought out of Egypt by a mighty hand, and miraculously delivered from their enemies, and received the divine commandments through Moses, who uniformly addressed them,—not some, but all,—as God's chosen, holy, and peculiar people.

But, lastly, what was the nature of this election of the Israelites? *To what* were they thus chosen by their Almighty Ruler? Were they elected absolutely and infallibly to enter the promised land, and to triumph over their enemies, and to live in security, wealth, and enjoyment? Manifestly not. They were elected to the privilege of having these blessings placed *within their reach*, on the condition of their obeying the law which God had given them;

but those who refused this obedience, were not only excluded from the promised blessings, but were the objects of God's especial judgments, far beyond those inflicted on the heathen nations, who had not been so highly favoured; whose idolatry and wickedness was, generally speaking, far less uniformly and severely visited: "With a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out will I rule over you," was the threat denounced against the disobedient Israelites; of the fulfilment of which, numerous instances are recorded in Scripture; and one most striking one is before our eyes; the forlorn and ruined condition, as a nation,^c at the present day, of those who rejected the long-promised Messiah, and invoked his blood upon "themselves and on their children." Still, however, whether obedient or rebellious, they were all of them the peculiar and elect people of God; because on all of them,—on every individual without exception,—of that people, the *privileges* were bestowed; and to every one of them the *offer* made, of God's

^c I have enlarged on this subject in a discourse on "National Blessings and Judgments."

especial blessing and protection, on condition of their conforming to the commands He had condescended to give them. But whether they *would* thus conform or not, was all along studiously represented by Moses as a matter entirely dependent on themselves; "Behold," says he, "I have set before you this day good and evil, blessing and cursing; now, therefore, choose blessing."

The election then of the Jews was arbitrary indeed; but it was an election, not to blessing, absolutely, but to a *privilege* and *advantage*;—to the *offer* and *opportunity* of obtaining a peculiar blessing, such as was not placed within the reach of other nations. Whether they would accept the offer, or draw down God's curse on them by their disobedience, rested with themselves. And that they were left at liberty to pursue this latter course is plain, from this most remarkable circumstance; that of all the adult individuals of them who came out of Egypt, and heard the law delivered from Mount Sinai, two only reached the promised land. Of the rest, the whole generation were cut off in the wilderness for their disobedience.

Now to apply these observations to the Gospel-dispensation: it is plain, as has been said, that the Christian church stands in the place of the Jewish;—that it succeeds it in the divine favour, and enjoys, not the same indeed, but *corresponding* benefits and privileges; it is reasonable, therefore, to suppose, that since both dispensations are parts of the one plan of the one heavenly Author, those benefits and privileges should be bestowed according to a similar system in each. The Christian religion, however, is not, like the Jewish, confined to one *nation*, nor the Christian worship to one *place*, like the temple at Jerusalem: the Church of Christ is open to all to whom the Gospel has been announced, and comprehends all who acknowledge it: the invitations of that Gospel are general; all members of that Church are “Called and Elected” by God, and are as truly his people, and under his especial government, as the Israelites ever were. And though they do not consist of any one *nation* in particular, they are arbitrarily selected and called to this privilege, out of the rest of the world, and in contradistinction from their unenlightened ancestors, according to God’s unsearchable will, for

reasons known to Him alone, no less than the Israelites were of old. Some nations, we know, had the Gospel preached to them long before others: the Apostles were directed by the Holy Ghost what countries they should first visit and enlighten by their ministry; and many there are, that remain in ignorance of Christianity to this day. We can give no account of this distinction, but that such is God's pleasure. No reason can be assigned why we ourselves, for instance, in this country, should have received the light of the Gospel, while many other regions of the earth remain in the darkness of idolatry. The Calling and selection of us and of other Christians to the knowledge of the true God, seems as arbitrary as that of the Israelites. And as this promise belonged not to *some* only, but to every one, of that nation, whether he chose to avail himself of it, or to convert it into a heavy curse by his neglect of it; so we may conclude that every Christian is called and elected to the Christian privileges, just as every Jew was to his; but that it rests with us to use or abuse the advantage. The Jews were not chosen to enjoy God's favour and to enter into the promised

land, *absolutely*; but to have the *offer* of that favour, and the promise of that land, on condition of their obedience; and as many as were rebellious, perished in the wilderness. So also, we may conclude, no Christian is elected to eternal salvation, *absolutely*; but only to the knowledge of the Gospel,—to the privileges of the Christian Church,—to the offer of God's Holy Spirit—and to the *promise* of final salvation, on condition of being a faithful follower of Christ.

Such, I say, we might antecedently conjecture, must be the right interpretation of the Apostle's language, considering how constantly and how clearly all the circumstances of the old dispensation must be supposed to have been before his mind. But in the instance now before us we are not left to conjecture: he himself draws the parallel for us, and strongly directs our attention to it; reminding us, in the most distinct manner, of the principles by which we are to be guided in our examination of the Gospel-scheme. He not only always addresses his converts (the very persons whom he all along congratulates as the Called, and Favoured, and Elect of God) as if it depended on themselves

to avail themselves, or not, of these offers,—to “lay hold on eternal life,” or to forfeit it by their own neglect,—but he also warns them, from the very example of the Israelites, against the error of misunderstanding *what* it was to which they were elected. For some of them, it is probable, having been always addressed as the “Chosen” of God, were disposed to indulge in careless security, relying on their baptismal privileges, and confident of final salvation independent of such exertions as can alone justify that confidence; even as the Jews “thought to say within themselves, we are Abraham’s children.” The Apostle, accordingly, himself expressly points out the correspondence between their case and that of the children of Israel; exhorting them to take warning from the backslidings and punishment of their predecessors, God’s favoured people of old. He observes to the Corinthians, first, that it was not a part only, but the *whole* of the Israelites who were thus favoured: “all our fathers were under the cloud, and *all* passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” But, notwithstanding this, (as he proceeds to point out)

“ with many of them God was not well-pleased ; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted ; neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them ; . . . neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three-and-twenty thousand ; neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents ; neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things (he adds) happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come ; ” and thence he deduces the great general conclusion, “ Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. ” Let not the Christian, that is, though he is one of God’s peculiar and favoured people, as the Israelites were of old, flatter himself that he is chosen, any more than they were, to the absolute attainment of a final blessing, but only to the offer of it, together with the privileges and advantages which will enable him to attain it : let him not doubt that the option is left to him,

as it was to them, of securing or forfeiting his ultimate reward : let him learn from the example of the Israelites, that neither his promised inheritance is infallibly secured to him *without* obedience, nor he himself absolutely secured *in* the requisite obedience, without any watchfulness on his part ; since the far greater portion of those whom God brought out of Egypt never reached the promised land.^d

It is worth remembering, that the system just described is the same with that pursued in the ordinary course of God's providence also : a man's being born, for instance, heir to great wealth,—to high rank,—or to a kingdom,—of a healthy constitution,—or of superior abilities, does not depend on himself ; but it does depend on himself whether such advantages as these shall prove a blessing to him, by his making a right use of them, or shall aggravate his condemnation, through his ill-employment or neglect of them.

He then who diligently looks to the analogy

^d " I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them that believed not."—Jude 5.

both of God's ordinary dealings with man, and of his former dispensation to the Jews, and who carefully interprets the New Testament by the Old, will be enabled, I think, to clear up the greater part of a difficulty which has furnished matter of dispute among Christians for many centuries. By contemplating the correspondence between the Jewish and the Gospel-schemes, he will clearly perceive that there is no such distinction among Christians as the "Called" and the uncalled,—the "Elect" and the non-elect;—that the Gospel itself is a call to all who have heard it; and that those who, instead of obeying it, wait for any further call, are deluded by the father of lies, who is watching for their destruction.—He will perceive, that though all born in a Christian country, and initiated into Christ's Church, are arbitrarily elected to this invaluable privilege, their salvation is *not* arbitrary, but will depend on the use they make of their privileges; those, namely, to which all Christians are called,—the knowledge of the Gospel, the aids of the Holy Spirit, and the offer of eternal life; privileges of which all are exhorted, but none compelled, to make a right

use; and which will prove ultimately either a blessing or a curse to each, according to the use he makes of them.

When it is contended, however, that the term "Elect," or that any other scriptural expression, is to be interpreted in this or in that sense, this must be understood, in reference to the particular passages in question, or to the generality;—not, as implying that no other sense is any where admissible, and that if the explanation given be correct, it must hold good in every passage where the word occurs. For instance, when the Apostles address their converts universally as the "Elect," or "Chosen" of God, (even as the whole nation of Israel were of old his Chosen) this must be understood of their being chosen out of the whole mass of the Gentiles, to certain peculiar privileges, unknown to successive generations of their ancestors, but of which *they* were called and invited to avail themselves. But our Lord applies the word differently in the parables of the labourers of the vineyard, and of the marriage-feast. The wedding, He tells us, was furnished with guests by an indiscriminate collection of all that could be found in the highways; but the guest who

refused to put on the wedding garment, was “cast into the outer-darkness;” “for many,” he adds, “are called, but few chosen;” many, that is, are “called” to the enjoyment of high privileges, but few make such a use of the advantage as to be finally “chosen;” not, in this instance, (as the word is more commonly employed) chosen to a privilege merely, but to ultimate reward;—chosen as having rightly availed themselves of that privilege;—selected from among the faithless and disobedient to “enter into the joy of their Lord.” Not that in this case the word “chosen” is used in different *meanings*, but that its *application* is different; both parties are, in the same sense, “chosen;” but the things *to which* they are chosen are different; and there is a corresponding difference in the principles on which the choice is conducted.^e

There is, indeed, no more fruitful source of error in this, and in many other points, than the practice of interpreting Scripture on the principles of a scientific system, and endeavouring to make out, as in mathematics, a complete technical

^e See “Elements of Logic.” Fallacies, Ch. iii. § 10.

vocabulary, with precise definitions of all the terms employed, such as may be applied in every case where they occur.^f Nothing, manifestly, was further from the design of the Sacred Writers, than to frame any such system: their writings were popular, not scientific; they expressed their meaning, on each occasion, in the terms which, on each occasion, suggested themselves as best fitted to convey it; and he who would interpret rightly each of these terms, must interpret it in each passage according to the context of the place where it is found. And wherever the term "Elect" relates (as it does in most instances) to an arbitrary, irrespective, unconditional decree, it will, I think,^g be found invariably to bear the sense in which I have explained it.

That a doctrine, therefore, so opposite to the one here laid down, should have been deduced from the Scriptures by many ingenious and diligent students of them, one can hardly avoid attributing, in some degree, to their entering on the study with a strong antecedent bias in favour of the conclusion they draw; in consequence of

^f See Essay II. § 4.

their regarding it as a truth abstractedly demonstrable by reason. But for such a bias, we should hardly find so many passages of Scripture interpreted so hastily, and often so much wrested from their obvious sense, to make them afford confirmation of the favourite hypothesis. For instance, the scriptural similitude of the potter and the clay is often triumphantly appealed to, as a proof that God has from eternity decreed, and, what is more, has *revealed to us* that He has so decreed, the salvation or perdition of each individual, without any other reason assigned than that such is his will and pleasure: we are in his hands, say these predestinarians, “as clay in the potter’s, who hath power, of the same lump, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour;” not observing, in their hasty eagerness to seize on every apparent confirmation of their system, that this similitude, as far as it goes, rather makes against them; since the potter never makes any vessel for the *express purpose* of being broken and destroyed. This comparison accordingly agrees much better with the view here taken: the potter, according to his own arbitrary choice, makes “of the same lump one

vessel to honour and another to dishonour ;” *i. e.* some to nobler, and some to meaner uses ; but all, for *some* use ; none, with design that it should be cast away, and dashed to pieces : even so, the Almighty, of his own arbitrary choice, causes some to be born to wealth or rank, others, to poverty and obscurity ;—some in a heathen, and others in a Christian country ; the advantages and privileges bestowed on each, are various, and, as far as we can see, arbitrarily dispensed ; the final rewards or punishments depend, as we are plainly taught, on the use or abuse of those advantages. Wealth and power, and christian knowledge, and all other advantages, may be made either a blessing or a curse to the possessor ; since they plainly answer to the talents in our Lord’s parable : why one servant had five talents intrusted to him, another two, and another one,—in what consisted “ their several abilities,”—we are not told ; though we may be sure the distribution was *not* made on the ground of the *fore-seen use* they would make of the talents ; else, he who received the one, and kept it laid up in a napkin, would not have been intrusted with any. But we are plainly told on what principles

all these servants were ultimately judged by their Master; those who had received the five, and the two talents, were rewarded, not from arbitrary choice, but because they had rightly employed the deposit; and the unprofitable servant was punished, not because he had received only one, but because he had let it lie idle.

The “hardening of Pharaoh’s heart” again, which is mentioned in Scripture, is often triumphantly appealed to, as a recorded instance in which (according to the hasty interpretation sometimes adopted) God made the King of Egypt, what we call hard-hearted; that is, *cruel* and *remorseless*; on purpose to display his almighty power upon him: whereas a very moderate attention to the context would plainly evince that this (whether true or false) is very far from being revealed in Scripture; but, that on the contrary, the hardening (or as some more properly translate, the strengthening) of Pharaoh’s heart, must mean a judicial blindness of intellect^s as to his own

^s The “heart” is continually employed by the Sacred Writers to denote the *understanding*; as when our Lord is said to “upbraid the disciples for their unbelief and *hardness-of-heart*,” &c. They never, I believe, employ *σκληροκαρδία*, to

interest, and a vain and absurd self-confidence, which induced him to hold out against Omnipotence. For it is remarkable that the *cruelties* he had practised, had all of them taken place *before* any mention is made of God's hardening his heart. The tyrant who had subjected to grievous slavery and attempted to extirpate the Israelites, could scarcely, after that, be *made* cruel; but the most unrelenting miscreant would have let them go, through mere selfish prudence, had he not been supernaturally infatuated, when he saw that they were "a snare unto him," and that "Egypt was destroyed" through the mighty plagues inflicted on their account.^b

signify cruelty. The same appears to have been anciently the usage of our own language also; of which we retain a remnant, in the expression of "learning any thing *by heart*."

^b I have been informed that some of the hearers of the discourse of which this Essay contains the substance, understood the foregoing argument to be merely a repetition of Mr. Sumner's, in his valuable work on "Apostolical Preaching." Such a misapprehension is, I trust, less likely to take place in the closet; but to guard against the possibility of it, it may be worth while here to remark, that though I coincide with Mr. S. in his conclusion, the arguments by which we, respectively, arrive at it, are different. The distinction which

To sum up, then, in a single sentence, the error which appears to me to have originated from a neglect of the lesson which the Old Testament may supply: the doctrine that final salvation is represented in Scripture as resting solely on the arbitrary appointment of God, is deduced from two premises; 1st, that Election infallibly implies salvation; and, 2dly, that Election is entirely arbitrary; whence it follows, certainly, that final salvation is arbitrary. Now many of the opponents of this conclusion are accustomed to deny the true premise, and admit the false one; acknowledging that Election necessarily implies ultimate salvation, but contending that it is *not* arbitrary, but depends on foreseen faith and obedience; a position which gives their opponents a decided advantage over them, and which the analogy of the old dispensation to the new may convince us is

he dwells on, is that, between *national*, and *individual* election; that on which I have insisted, is, the distinction between election to certain *privileges*, and to *final reward*; he, in short, considers principally the *parties* chosen; whether bodies of men, or particular persons: I, the things *to* which they are chosen; whether to a blessing *absolutely*, or to the *offer* of one, conditionally.

untenable; whereas, in denying that Election does necessarily imply salvation, they would find the whole analogy of the Old Testament, and the general tenour of St. Paul's admonitions, so completely in their favour, that the offensive conclusions would be, as far as Scripture testimony goes, irrecoverably overthrown: and it would be seen that the abstract metaphysical questions respecting Fate and Free-will, are left by the Bible exactly where it finds them, undecided and untouched.

§ 4. Without entering at large on the metaphysical questions just alluded to, one remark respecting them will not be irrelevant, as it may throw light on the subject more particularly before us. I mean that the difficulty and confusion in which such questions have been involved, have, in a great degree, arisen from inattention to the ambiguity of one particular class of words — “possible”^h and “impossible,” “necessary,” “certain,” “contingent,” and many

^h See “Logic,” Appendix, article “Possible.” See also Appendix, No. I. to Archbp. King's Discourse on Predestination.

others of corresponding significations to these; which have, by their undetected ambiguity, bewildered in a maze of fruitless logomachy most of those who have treated of the subject. "Certainty," for instance, and "uncertainty," which in the primary sense, denote the state of our own mind, have thence been transferred to the *facts* and *events* respecting which *we* are certain or uncertain, and ultimately, have come to be considered as indicating an intrinsic quality in the events themselves, and not merely the relation in which they stand to our knowledge or ignorance of them; and "necessity," as well as other words allied to it, whose signification sometimes refers to *coercion*, or absence of *power*, sometimes again merely to undoubting and complete *knowledge*, have led to endless fallacies and perplexities, when this distinction has been overlooked. Thus, the "necessity" (*i. e.* the absence of freedom) of human actions, has by many been inferred from God's certain foreknowledge of them. And to this it is not, I think, altogether a satisfactory reply (which is often made), that the divine prescience does not fetter or control men's actions, nor in any

way operate upon them, any more than *our* knowledge of any fact is the cause of its being such; for though this is undeniably true, it hardly meets the difficulty; since it is not meant, I apprehend, that the divine foreknowledge *makes* actions necessary, but that it *implies* that they *are* so; just as any one's seeing some object before him, implies the real present existence of that object; though no one supposes that his seeing it is, in any respect, the *cause* of its existence. But the chief source of this perplexity is the equivocal employment of the word "necessity;" which, in one sense, relates to *knowledge* alone, and, therefore, is, of course, implied by prescience; but in another sense, relates to *compulsion*, or want of power, which prescience does by no means imply.^k When we speak, for instance, of the "necessity" of mathematical truths, we mean merely that they admit of no *doubt*. And again, when we say that a man pining in captivity *cannot but* eagerly embrace the offer of freedom, and restoration to his country, we mean not that he is thus placed

^a See Tucker's *Light of Nature*, Chap. 26.

under *compulsion*, but that we are *well-assured* and have no *doubt* he *will* do so. On the other hand, when we say that, while in captivity, he *cannot but* submit to the will of his master, we mean that he wants *power* to resist, and *liberty* to escape; and when we speak of the necessity of death, we mean that mortals are *unable* to avoid it. If this distinction had been duly attended to, it would hardly, I think, have been contended that *that* necessity of our actions, which the divine prescience implies, is at all incompatible with our freedom and power to act otherwise. Whether our conduct *be, in fact*, under any restraint or not, at least no restraint is implied by the mere foreknowledge of it. Let it be supposed (and the case is at least *conceivable*) that you were fully and accurately acquainted with the inclinations of some man who was left at perfect liberty to follow them; you could then as distinctly know and as exactly describe his future conduct, as any past event; and the very ground of your thus foreseeing and foretelling it would be, not his being under restraint, but his entire freedom from it; for the knowledge of his inclination,

if he were *not* free to follow it, would not enable you to foresee the event.

The divine foreknowledge, again, of “contingent” or “uncertain” events, would not have been made a matter of such mysterious difficulty, if it had been remembered that the same thing may be contingent and uncertain to one person, which is not so to another; since those terms denote no quality in the events themselves, any more than the terms “visible” and “invisible” when applied to eclipses; inasmuch as that which is visible in one part of the world is invisible in another; for the same event may, in like manner, be both a *contingency* and a *certainty*; though not to *the same person*. Any event, for instance, which occurred yesterday in some distant part of the world, is, to us, uncertain and contingent; and one who calculates on its having taken place in this way or that, would be said to run the risk of fortune; though to those on the spot there is no contingency in the case.

Before I dismiss the consideration of this subject, I would suggest one caution relative to a class of objections frequently urged against the

Calvinistic scheme—those drawn from the conclusions of what is called natural religion, respecting the moral attributes of the Deity; which, it is contended, render the reprobation of a large portion of mankind an absolute impossibility. That such objections do reduce the predestinarian to a great strait, is undeniable; and not seldom are they urged with exulting scorn, with bitter invective, and almost with anathema. But we should be very cautious how we employ such weapons as may recoil upon ourselves. Arguments of this description have often been adduced, such as, I fear, will crush beneath the ruins of the hostile structure the blind assailant who has overthrown it. It is a frightful, but an undeniable truth, that multitudes, even in christian countries, are born and brought up under such circumstances as afford them no probable, often no possible, chance of obtaining a knowledge of religious truths, or a habit of moral conduct, but are even trained from infancy in superstitious error and gross depravity. Why this should be permitted, neither Calvinist nor Arminian can explain; nay, why the Almighty does not cause to die in the cradle every infant whose future

wickedness and misery, if suffered to grow up; He foresees, is what no system of religion, natural or revealed, will enable us satisfactorily to account for. In truth, these are merely branches of the *one* great difficulty, *the existence of evil*, which may almost be called the *only* difficulty in theology. It assumes indeed various shapes;—it is, by many, hardly recognized as a difficulty; and not a few have professed and believed themselves to have solved it; but it still meets them, though in some new and disguised form, at every turn; like a resistless stream, which, when one channel is dammed up, immediately forces its way through another. And as the difficulty is one not *peculiar to any one* hypothesis, but bears equally on all alike, whether of revealed or of natural religion, it is better in point of prudence as well as of fairness, that the consequences of it should not be pressed as an objection against any. The Scriptures do not pretend (as some have rashly imagined) to clear up this awful mystery: they give us no explanation of the original *cause* of the evil that exists; but they teach us how to avoid its *effects*: and since they leave this great and perplexing question just where they find it,

it is better for us to leave it among “the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God,” and to occupy ourselves with “the things which are revealed,” and which concern us practically,—which “*belong* unto us and to our children,” that we may “*do* all the words of God’s law.”

§ 5. It is on these principles, viz. that the first point of inquiry at least ought to be what doctrines are *revealed* in God’s word,—and that we ought to expect that the doctrines so revealed should be, not matters of speculative curiosity but of *practical* importance—such as “*belong* to us that we may *do* them ;”—it is in conformity, I say, with these principles, that I have waived the question as to the *truth or falsity* of the Calvinistic doctrine of Election ; inquiring only whether it is *revealed* : and one of the reasons for deciding that question in the negative, is the very circumstance that the doctrine is, if rightly viewed, of a purely *speculative* character, not “*belonging* to us” practically,—and which *ought* not at least, in any way, to influence our conduct. It has indeed been frequently objected to the

Calvinistic doctrines, that they lead, if consistently acted upon, to a sinful, or to a careless, or to an inactive life; and the inference deduced from this alleged tendency, has been that they are not true. But this is a totally distinct line of argument, both in premises and conclusion, from that now adverted to; and I mention it, not for the purpose either of maintaining or impugning it, but merely of pointing out the distinction. Whatever may be, in fact, the practical ill tendency of the Calvinistic scheme, it is undeniable that many pious and active Christians, who have adopted it, have denied any such tendency,—have attributed the mischievous consequences drawn, not to their doctrines rightly understood, but to the perversion and abuse of them;—and have so explained them, to their own satisfaction, as to be compatible and consistent with active virtue. Now if instead of objecting to, we admit, the explanations of this system, which the soundest and most approved of its advocates have given, we shall find that, when understood as they would have it, it can lead to *no* practical result whatever. Some Christians, according to them, are eternally enrolled in the book of life, and

infallibly ordained to salvation, while others are reprobate and absolutely excluded; but as the preacher, (they add) has no means of knowing, in the first instance at least, which persons belong to which class; and since those who are thus ordained are to be saved through the *means* God has appointed; the offers, and promises, and threatenings of the Gospel are to be addressed to all alike, as if no such distinction existed. The preacher, in short, is to *act* in all respects, as if the system were not true. Each individual Christian again, according to them, though he is to believe that he either is, or is not, absolutely destined to eternal salvation, yet is also to believe, that *if* his salvation is decreed, his holiness of life is also decreed;—he is to judge of his own state by “the fruits of the Spirit” which he brings forth: to live in sin, or to relax his virtuous exertions, would be an indication of his not being really (though he may flatter himself he is) one of the elect. And it may be admitted that one who does practically adopt and conform to this explanation of the doctrine, will not be led into any evil by it; since his conduct will not be in any respect influenced by it. When thus

explained, it is reduced to a purely speculative dogma, barren of all practical results.

Taking the system in question then, as expounded by its soundest advocates, it is impossible to show any one point in which a person is called upon either to act or to feel, in any respect differently, *in consequence* of his adopting it. And this conclusion indeed may be considered as virtually admitted by the maintainers of the predestinarian scheme; since whenever they are engaged in setting forth the beneficial results of their doctrines, they invariably dwell on such as are *not* peculiar to them; such as, faith in the atonement,—self-abasement and renunciation of all reliance on our own merits,—gratitude for Christ's redeeming mercy,—and reliance on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit; and other such doctrines, which are indeed both true and of inestimable practical value, but which have no necessary or natural connexion with the peculiar notions of Calvin respecting Election; and which, in fact, are sincerely and heartily embraced by numbers who reject those notions.

Were I as much inclined to enter into controversy as I am averse to it, on this point at

least I should have no temptation to do so; since I cannot devise or even conceive any more decisive proofs of what has been just remarked, than the very objections adduced by those who wish to disprove it. Let any one try the experiment of proposing to a predestinarian the assertion just made, of the purely-speculative character of the doctrines in question; and he will find the grounds on which it is denied to be sufficient to satisfy an unbiassed mind of its truth. They will allege the cheering stimulant of love and gratitude which a man feels who is convinced that his sins are forgiven, and that a crown of glory is laid up for him after he shall have fought the good fight, and finished his course: but they will admit that this confidence is false and dangerous, unless he shall have ascertained by careful and candid self-examination that he is practically imbued with Christian hope, faith, and charity, and is earnestly striving to "increase more and more," and to "grow in grace" to his life's end. Now this last may be the case with one who does not hold the absolute election to salvation of some, and the reprobation of others. And a confidence

founded *on good grounds*, I for one at least, should never think of repressing.¹ They will enumerate the many zealous and active Christians who have been strict predestinarians;—the Reformers, forward in testifying against Romish errors, who have held the same tenet;—and the attachment of many bigoted Papists to the doctrine of free-will, (though by the way, Augustine, the strenuous advocate of predestination, is, among the Fathers, rather the favourite saint of the Romish church,) as well as the immoral lives of many who reject predestination, &c. But if any one keeps close to the original question, and persists in asking, How do you *trace* those good effects to a belief in your absolute decrees? How do you show that your *peculiar* doctrines are, not merely *compatible* with Christian virtue, (for that is admitted) but *conducive* to it? How do you trace these other ill effects to a rejection of those peculiar doctrines? How is it proved that the parties respectively act as they do, properly *in consequence* of their belief or disbelief of this tenet?—if, I say, these questions are

¹ See next Essay.

persisted in, and all irrelevant matter set aside, I am much mistaken if any satisfactory answer will be obtained. The fact is that several of the most important and truly-practical doctrines of Christianity have been, in the minds of some men, so intimately blended, from their childhood, with other tenets which are *not* practical, that they themselves, unless possessed of unusual clearness of thought, are utterly unable to conceive them disunited; and might even be in some danger of abandoning what is essential, were they induced to give up some other point, in reality totally unconnected with it. Their whole system of faith may be compared to some of the ancient compound medicines, of great efficacy and value, though cumbered with several dregs that are utterly inert. Many practitioners unskilled in analysis, cannot conceive but that the success with which the compound is often administered is a proof of the efficacy of each ingredient, and of the absurdity of thinking to separate them.

I am far from thinking harshly of predestinarians, or of deciding that their peculiar doctrines are altogether untrue; though to me

they do not appear, at least, to be either *practical* or *revealed* truths. I do not call on them to renounce their opinions as heretical, but merely to abstain from imposing on others as a necessary part of the Christian faith a doctrine which cannot be *clearly* deduced from Scripture, and which there is this additional reason for supposing *not* to be revealed in Scripture, that it cannot be shown to have any practical tendency. For since it is plainly the object of the Scriptures to declare to us such truths as it concerns us to know, with a view to the regulation of our lives, not, such as are, to us, mere matters of speculative curiosity; and since the doctrines in question, when so explained as to lead to no *evil* results, lead to *no* practical results at all, the natural inference must be (even independent of the arguments formerly urged) that these doctrines are *not* such as we can reasonably expect at least, to find revealed in Scripture; and if not so *revealed*, be they true or false, they can constitute no part of the *Christian faith*.^m It is not contended that the doctrines in question have a

^m See Essay in first Series.

hurtful influence on human conduct, and consequently are *untrue*; but that they have, according to the soundest exposition of them, *no* influence on our conduct whatever; and, consequently, that they are not to be taught as *revealed* truths.

§ 6. Let it not be said, however, that, being at least harmless, it is unimportant whether they are inculcated or not; they are harmless, *to those* who adopt them in the sense, and with the qualifications just mentioned; but it does not follow that they are harmless to others. On the one hand, that “the doctrines of predestination and our election in Christ” may be so held as to prove (according to the language of our article) a “dangerous downfall,” will hardly be denied by any; and, on the other hand, they may prove a stumbling-block to those who do not hold them, by raising a prejudice against other doctrines—some of the most important of Christianity,—when taught in conjunction with these, and represented as connected with them. Now it is to be admitted, indeed, that there may be dangers of this nature attendant on every *gospel-truth*; since there is none that may not be perverted by some,

or that may not give offence to others; but in the case of any thing which plainly appears *to be* gospel-truth, this danger must be braved; we *must* preach God's word as we have received it, and trust in Him to prosper and defend it: but it is not so, in the case of doctrines which (whether true or not) are not plainly declared in Scripture; the dangers to which any *such* doctrines may lead, are *needlessly* and wantonly incurred; and those who preach them are answerable for the results. If the speculations of human ingenuity be mingled with the revealed word of God, even though the opinions maintained be true, some may be misled, and others unnecessarily disgusted; Christianity may be loaded (as Dr. Paley expresses himself respecting transubstantiation) with a weight that sinks it; and the mischiefs ensuing will be justly imputable to the rashness of those who give occasion to them.

Let Christians, then, be taught to rejoice indeed in their high privileges, as the "Called," and "Elect," and "Peculiar people of God;" but let them be taught also, while they offer up their thanks for his unmerited mercies, to consider their own diligence and care as indispensable,

not only to their attainment of the offered blessings, but also to their escape from an aggravated condemnation, — for “provoking and grieving Him, who has done so great things for them,” “as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” Let them be told to trust indeed firmly in the aid and guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, which will conduct those who earnestly seek it, and walk according to it, through the perils of the wilderness of this world, to the glories of their promised inheritance; but let them learn from the rebellious Israelites, that He will not force them to enter into that good land, but will even exclude from it those who refuse to hearken to Him. Wherefore, “let him that thinketh he standeth *take heed* lest he fall.” God is indeed “faithful who hath promised;” but He requires us also to be faithful to ourselves; and He has taught us, both by direct precepts and by examples, that if we harden our hearts, and will not hear his voice, we shall not “enter into his rest.”

ESSAY IV.

ON PERSEVERANCE AND ASSURANCE.



§ 1. THERE are many passages in the Apostle Paul's writings in which he expresses his assured expectation of the final success of his converts in attaining the gospel-promises: for instance, "Being *confident* of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;" *i. e.* that at his last coming to judge the world, they will be numbered among the inheritors of immortal happiness with him. It is in a similar tone that he addresses the Corinthians in the beginning of his first Epistle to them: "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also *confirm you unto the end*, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Indeed there is hardly any one

of his Epistles in which he does not express the same exulting anticipation of eternal life awaiting his beloved on earth: the gratitude and joy which he consequently feels on their behalf, are scarcely ever left unmentioned.

Passages of this description are appealed to as establishing the doctrine of "final Perseverance" and "Assurance;" that is, of the impossibility of ultimate failure, to those who are once truly elected of God; and the complete conviction which such persons may attain on earth of their own safety. The dangerous consequences again, apprehended by many, from these as well as other doctrines maintained on this Apostle's authority, have accordingly but too often led them to depreciate his writings, or to regard them with suspicion and dread, and to keep them in a great degree out of sight.

That such opinions as those alluded to (as far, that is, as they *are* erroneous and mischievous) have been grounded on a misunderstanding of these writings, and may be the most effectually refuted by a fair and correct exposition of the Author's meaning, I have endeavoured to show in the preceding Essay, as far as relates to the

doctrine of Christian Election. Closely connected with this, and next in natural order to it, are the other doctrines just mentioned; on which, accordingly, I now propose to offer some remarks. But it will be the less necessary to dwell on them, on account of that closeness of connexion; the one question being a kind of offshoot from the other. Absolute predestination to eternal life evidently implies the physical impossibility of ultimate failure,—in short, the infallible *perseverance* of the Elect; and if any one have arrived at the knowledge that *he* is one of the Elect, he cannot but have the most complete Assurance of his own safety. And these notions are, not without some probable grounds at least, regarded by many as pernicious in the extreme;—as naturally leading to careless and arrogant confidence,—spiritual pride,—relaxation of virtuous efforts,—and indulgence of vicious propensities. They have accordingly laboured to repel this danger by dwelling much and sedulously on the *uncertainty*, even to the last, of the state of even the best Christian; and of the *possibility* of his falling even from the most confirmed state of grace and holiness.

§ 2. It should be remembered, however, that we may in our extreme caution against one danger, fall into the opposite. Presumptuous confidence, and careless security, are indeed evils to be carefully guarded against; but they are not the *only* evils to be apprehended: despondency, and, what is more likely to occur, a deadness of the affections in all that relates to religion, and a total aversion of the mind towards it, may be generated, in some persons at least, by dwelling too much and too earnestly on the chances of ultimate failure. It should be remembered, too, that the doctrines of Perseverance in godliness, and of Assurance of salvation, in *some* sense or other, have received the full sanction of the Apostle Paul; nor would he so often and so strongly have expressed his grateful exultation in the spiritual state of his converts, and his full confidence that the good work begun in them would ultimately be completed, had he not considered the exhibition of these cheering and encouraging prospects, as highly edifying, and conducive to their christian progress. And I cannot but think that his example in this point has been too little attended

to by some writers; who overlook the dangers on one side, while they overrate those on the other; which at the same time they do not take the most effectual way to obviate. It is not enough that they express the fullest confidence in God's fulfilment of his promises, to all who are not wanting on *their* part. To one whose mind is disposed to serious thoughtfulness, all doubts respecting his final salvation (however well convinced he may be that if he fail of it, the fault will be his own)—doubts which must imply the apprehension of the unspeakably horrible alternative,—cannot but suggest (in proportion as they prevail) the *wish* that Christianity were untrue:—that this life were the whole of his existence, rather than that the remotest risk of such an alternative should be incurred.^a And a wish of this kind is utterly at variance with such a state of mind, as, according to Paul, the Christian's ought to be. For it must not be

^a It is to be observed, that when I speak of the horror of being in any *doubt*, or of apprehending any *risk*—contemplating any *chance*, of this or that evil, &c., I mean, *absolute*, not hypothetical or *conditional* risk,—possibility—probability, &c., for this latter *does not occasion any uneasiness*: a man is shocked, for instance, at the idea of the remotest risk of being overwhelmed in the sea, or of perishing with hunger;

imagined that a *wish* relative to something which (as in the present case) does not at all *depend* on our choice, must, therefore, be wholly inoperative and unimportant. No man's wishes can indeed make a religion false ; they may even not cause him to disbelieve it ; but they may yet very easily lead him (without any deliberate design) habitually to withdraw his thoughts from a painfully alarming subject. There is a propensity in the human mind, which, however unreasonable and absurd, is instinctive, and almost unavoidable, to turn away, insensibly more and more, from the contemplation of that which is unpleasant. Nor will such feelings of dread, distaste, and aversion, as have been alluded to, be necessarily confined (as at first sight one might suppose) to men who are knowingly leading such a life as can afford them little or no just ground of hope in the gospel-promises ; for it should be remembered, that the apprehension of suffering is so incomparably more keen than but he knows that when walking on the sea-shore, he would be probably overwhelmed, *if* he should stay there till the tide came up ; and that he would be starved *if* he should refuse to take the food that is before him : but this (as it may be called) *hypothetical* danger, gives him no uneasiness at all.

the anticipation of gratification,—so faint and feeble are our conceptions of happiness, compared with those of misery,—that the least admixture of a dread of any very terrible evil, will (when really impressed on the mind) more than counter-balance a far greater amount of favourable hopes; and, consequently, to a thoughtful mind, the idea of certain annihilation would appear far preferable to the remotest chance of endless misery.^b

Now it is with those of a thoughtful turn that we are concerned in the present question. As for the great mass of the careless and worldly, they are, indeed, for the most part, far too confident of salvation: but *their* confidence commonly results from a vague, general, unweighed notion of God's mercy; not, from any predestinarian persuasion of their being selected from the rest of mankind, and ordained to persevere in holiness, under the constant guidance of the Divine Spirit. *They* need, indeed, to be, if possible, alarmed and filled with apprehension: but it is a far different kind of alarm *they* need, from that of which we have been speaking; they need to be warned of the dangers attendant on a

^b See the last Note.

careless, not on an *active and zealous* christian life; of the danger, not of falling *from* a state of grace, but of never striving to be *in* such a state;—of the danger of losing heaven, not by *turning* from the service of God, but by not turning from the service of sin. *Their* false security arises, not from their dwelling, with too confident expectation, on the glories of a better world, but from their thinking too little, or not at all, of any world but this. Let such be alarmed, by all means possible, into a just sense of the ruin to which they are hastening, by taking no pains to lead a christian life; and to urge *such* a ground of alarm will have no tendency to dishearten those who are conscious of an earnest desire, and endeavour to live to God. And the more confidence is expressed of the final success of those who will come to Christ, and set themselves to work out their own salvation, the more will the sinner be encouraged to begin in earnest, and pursue with vigour, the great work of reformation.

§ 3. But is there, then, it may be asked, no “fear and trembling” to be felt by all men in

working out their salvation? Can any man be exempt from all danger of excessive and presumptuous confidence? Undoubtedly such a danger is always, and by every one, to be sedulously guarded against; but it will be best guarded against, not by seeking to lower the Christian's hopes, but by connecting his confidence with his own unremitting *efforts*; by striving to establish in his thoughts an inseparable combination between the idea of the happiness he looks forward to, and that of the requisite exertions on his part. The fullest confidence of attaining any object, if the attainment of it be still regarded as dependent on our own *endeavours*, and if that confidence be grounded on a firm resolution to *use* those endeavours, can never lead to negligence and inactivity.^c

^c There is a term applied in Scripture to persons who embraced the Christian faith, for which our language affords no adequate translation. We have not in English, as there is in Greek, a *present participle passive*; and this deficiency often drives us into awkward and sometimes obscure circumlocution: thus, if *τυπτομένος* is rendered "one who is beaten," this might be understood to relate to what is *past* and complete (which would be *τετυμμένος*); but it signifies properly, though in uncouth English, "one who is being beaten." The

The Christian who is earnestly striving to be led by the Holy Spirit, and to “grow in grace”

particular term I am now alluding to is *σωζόμενοι*, “the Lord added to the Church daily *such as should be saved* ;” *τοὺς σωζόμενους* : (Acts ii. 47) the word rendered “such as should be saved,” (a rendering which has perhaps led some readers who cannot, or do not, study the original, to suppose that absolute predestination is implied in this passage,) signifies merely “persons coming into the way of salvation,” namely, by embracing Christianity.

It is to be observed, however, by the way, that there are many expressions in Scripture, which do not even imply any full conviction in the writer’s mind that a particular event *will* take place ; though, taken strictly, they might seem to imply this, and have, probably, been often so understood. Instances may be found, probably, in all languages, but I think they are particularly common in Greek, of the same terms being used in speaking of an object *proposed*, and of an object *attained* ; a full *design* and *attempt* to do any thing, is often expressed in the same manner as if it had been actually done. Thus in the Ajax of Sophocles (to take an instance from a profane writer), Agamemnon charges Ajax with having murdered him ; *i. e.* having done all that in him lay to accomplish that purpose, though his design was frustrated by extraneous impediments. And, indeed, nothing is more common in most of the ancient writers, than to speak of a person’s having done this or that, *i. e.* having *been doing* it—having formed the design, and actually set about it, though the attempt was stopped. In this sense, the Lord is repeatedly said to have delivered the Israelites

daily, must not be told indeed that he cannot turn aside from the right path *if he would* ;

out of Egypt, to bring them into the land of Canaan, which he had promised to their forefathers ; and yet the whole generation perished in the wilderness through their own refusal, when summoned, to take possession of the promised land ; and a considerable portion of the promised land was never occupied even by their posterity, through their own neglect to drive out the nations whose territory had been allotted to them. In this case, the positive and unqualified declarations of Scripture, not only do not imply any compulsion exercised on the Israelites, but do not even imply a foreknowledge that the events would take place ; but merely that the Lord had performed *his* part, and had left it completely in their power to bring about the events in question.

So also, many of the expressions of the Sacred Writers, in which they speak of the holiness of life here, and eternal life hereafter, provided by the grace of God for those whom they are addressing, not only do not relate to any absolute predestination to reward, or irresistible control of the will ; but do not necessarily imply, according to a fair construction of the language, even so much as a perfect confidence in the writers, that these objects will, in fact, be attained ; but merely that such is the *design* and *tendency* of the gospel dispensation ;—that God had placed these things within their reach.

I am not contending, be it observed, that this absolute predestination and irresistible grace may not, *in fact*, be a part of the gospel-scheme in the Divine Mind ; but only that

that it is *out of his power* to fall into a life of sin : but *that* fear and trembling which I conceive Paul to have intended, the conviction, namely, that our care and diligence are never to be laid aside even to the end, will not lessen such confidence as proceeds on the full determination to *retain* that diligent care ; nor will it dash with any mixture of gloomy apprehensions the joyful anticipations with which such a Christian looks forward to a future life.

§ 4. We may learn, not only from the Apostle's precepts relative to christian trust and "joy in the Holy Ghost," but also from his example, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, in concerns of a different nature, that *he* at least did not consider the active and circumspect employment of means, inconsistent with the most undoubting certainty as to the event ; even a certainty founded on immediate precise revelation from heaven. Let any one read the account of what befel him

no inference to that effect can be fairly drawn from the words of the Apostles. They may be truths, but they are not revealed truths ; they may belong to the *gospel-scheme*, but not to the *gospel-revelation*.

while imprisoned at Jerusalem, and he will find him assured, by a supernatural vision, of his deliverance from the then present danger; "Be of good cheer, Paul, for thou must bear witness of me also at Rome." Yet when the designs of the conspirators to murder him came to his knowledge, he took every precaution (by sending to warn the chief captain) that prudent apprehension could suggest.^d Again was he favoured, on the occasion of the shipwreck, with a like supernatural assurance, that he, being destined by his Master to arrive at Rome, should be saved from the peril of the sea; and, moreover, that his companions should be spared also for his sake,^e and should come safe to land: yet immediately after, we find him using and suggesting every precautionary means that could have occurred to the most doubting and fearful: it was through Paul's presence of mind that the mariners were withheld from deserting the ship, and depriving the passengers of their needful aid: "Then said Paul, Except these abide in the ship, *ye cannot be saved*:"^f Was it

^d Acts xxiii. 17.^e Acts xxvii. 22.^f Act xxvii. 31.

then that he doubted, in this or in the former case, the supernatural assurance he had received? Surely not: but he regarded that very assurance as grounded on the supposition that he himself should employ all those regular means which he on his part was ready and fully resolved to employ: his exertions (which he was conscious of being determined to use) formed the hypothesis (if I may so speak) on which the divine promise proceeded; and he evidently judged it possible that he *might*, in one sense of the phrase, lose his life at Jerusalem, or in the shipwreck; *i. e.* it was in his *power* to cast away his life if he chose not to use the requisite exertions; but such a possibility as *this*, could not lead to any doubt or apprehension.⁵

Nor is this a distinction too refined for any but the highest and most perfect order of minds; on the contrary, experience shows that it is within the reach of the most ordinary capacity. Nothing indeed is more common than the expression of a full conviction as to what some person's conduct will be on some particular

⁵ See Note ³, p. 149, § 2.

occasion ; that conviction being grounded on the supposition that his disposition as to the point in question is fully ascertained, and that it is a matter depending on his own free choice. "Such a one is *sure*," it is said, "to act in this manner ;" "he is *incapable* of doing so and so." And when we thus prophesy another's conduct, we are evidently exempt from all danger of *mistake*, supposing we are originally correct in our judgment as to the other's inclination, and as to his being free to follow that inclination ; and yet, though it is in a certain sense "impossible that he should act otherwise, so far is this anticipation of his conduct from implying that he is powerless, or under restraint, that it proceeds on the very supposition of his being left perfectly free.

And again, with respect to one's own conduct, that confidence of success necessarily diminishes exertion, is notoriously the reverse of truth. "Possunt quia posse videntur," is a maxim whose triteness is a presumption of its justness. Every general, accordingly, seeks to inspire his soldiers with the firmest confidence of victory ; which experience proves to be the

best incentive to those exertions that are requisite to ensure it. Many a man, from having been persuaded by omens or by the predictions of astrologers, that he is *fated* to attain some great object, has, in consequence, instead of being lulled into carelessness by this belief, been excited to the most laborious and unwearied efforts, such as perhaps he would not otherwise have thought of making, for the attainment of his object.^h And the common

^h The Macbeth of Shakspeare may be appealed to as an example even more convincing than that of any single individual of real history; if at least it be admitted that Shakspeare in his delineations of character is true to nature. For if so, they must be conformable to *general* nature; and each character must be a representative, if not of Man universally, at least of some *class* of men. A real individual, on the contrary, may chance to be an exception to all general rules; but such a person could not be introduced in a drama without bringing censure on the poet as guilty of a departure from nature. Now Macbeth is evidently both prompted in the first instance to aim at the crown, and fortified to go through with his attempt, by the prediction of the witches. We might abstractedly have supposed that he would even have been withheld, had he previously had the design, from the perpetration of a crime he abhorred, by the consideration that it must be needless, since it was infallibly decreed that he should be king. Once, and only once, the thought occurs

sense even of the simple and unlearned Christian, will be sufficient to show him, and show him practically, the distinction between that vain confidence which leads to inactivity, and a rational confidence connected with exertion; *provided a due attention is but paid* to those ambiguities of language which have been already noticed. In fact, he may be easily taught that the distinction is one which he acts upon continually in the ordinary affairs of life. When returning, for instance, from his daily labour to his home, he feels a perfect certainty (supposing

to him, "If Fate will have me king, why Fate may crown me;" but far from acting on this view, rational as it appears, his conduct is throughout in direct opposition to it. It has been said, though not, I think, correctly, that, in cases of this kind, the belief in Fate does not lead to inactivity because it is *inoperative*. It does not indeed operate *in the same way* in which it would in *some* persons: there are many who would be deterred from incurring guilt or danger or toil for the sake of a kingdom by their being fully convinced of being fated to attain it. But others are led by this very belief to use efforts which they *otherwise would not* have used. Now, surely it is not correct to call that belief *inoperative*, which does palpably lead to results, merely because it seems to *us* strange that such should be the result.

his life and limbs to be spared) that he shall *reach* his home; it is an event of which, practically, he feels no more doubt than of the setting of the sun; but he does not therefore *stand still*, and neglect to use the means, because he is confident of the event; on the contrary, the very ground of his confidence is the full determination he feels to press forward towards his object.

In like manner, (it may be explained to him) it was in one sense possible, though in another sense impossible, that Paul should, even at his last trial, have deserted and renounced his Saviour; *i. e.* it was completely in his *power*; it *depended on himself* whether he would forsake his Lord, and forfeit his rich inheritance, or “lay hold on eternal life” which was just before him; so that in one sense it was true that he *might* fall and perish eternally; but he was conscious that though he had the power, he had not the will thus to apostatize; and, therefore, fully trusting in his Saviour’s promises, and in a resolution supported by divine aid, he pours forth (in his second Epistle to Timothy) his exulting confidence of persevering even to the end. “The time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight;

I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day!"

Let the careless Christian then be roused and alarmed;—let the presumptuous be warned and repressed;—but let no distressing and disheartening doubts be implanted in the breast of the zealous, though humble and timid follower of Christ: only let his confidence be always made to rest on the supposition of his own unremitting care and earnest endeavour; while, at the same time, it is also made to rest not on his own *unaided* strength, but on the promised support of Him who “worketh in us both to will and to do.” Let him be encouraged to rejoice at the bright prospect set before him; but to rejoice in the spiritual strength insured to him by the Lord, who “never faileth them that seek Him.” “Rejoice,” (says the Apostle, to such a Christian,) “rejoice *in the Lord* alway, and again I say, rejoice . . . being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ESSAY V.

ON THE ABOLITION OF THE LAW.

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THERE are very many passages relative to the Mosaic Law occurring in the writings of the Apostle Paul, (especially in the Epistle to the Romans, and in those to the Galatians and to the Hebrews), whose most obvious and simple interpretations, at least, would seem to imply the entire abolition of that law, by the establishment of the Gospel. For instance, Rom. vii. 6. "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held;"—or, according to another, and perhaps better reading, which makes no material difference, "being dead to that law wherein we were held." And these passages constitute one class of those from which such pernicious consequences have been sometimes deduced, and oftener, perhaps,

apprehended, as have occasioned the writings of this Apostle to be regarded by some persons with suspicion and alarm. A few, and but a few, have openly inferred,—a greater number probably have incautiously led their hearers to infer,—from Paul's declarations relative to our justification “by faith, without the deeds of the law,” that the Christian is under no obligation to the practice of virtue,—nor incurs, if he be one of the Elect, any spiritual danger from the commission of sin; and the dread of this Antinomian system has occasioned others, as I have before remarked, to withdraw their own and their hearers' attention, either from the writings of this Apostle altogether, or from those parts of them which are thought to countenance such a doctrine.

§ 1. That the virtuous or vicious conduct of a Christian have nothing to do with his final salvation, and are indifferent in God's sight, has been inferred from the total abrogation, under the gospel-scheme, of the Mosaic law; which abrogation, it is contended, the Apostle plainly declares, without any limitation or exception—any distinction between *moral*, and *ceremonial* or

civil precepts. On the other side is urged the strenuous and repeated inculcation of moral duties, not only by the other Sacred Writers, but by Paul himself as much as any; together with his earnest denial of the licentious consequences which some might be disposed to infer from his doctrines: for instance, "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." And again, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." And hence it is concluded that *that* abolition of the law which is spoken of, relates only to the *ceremonial* and *civil* precepts; and that the *moral* law remains binding on all men for ever. But this mode of stating the case, though substantially correct, leaves a considerable difficulty unsolved: it points out indeed the inconsistency of the Antinomian scheme with one portion of the Apostle's writings; but it leaves unexplained, and, consequently, open to unfavourable suspicion, the other portion before alluded to: it fails, in short, to reconcile the Writer with himself. For it cannot be denied that he does speak, frequently and strongly, of the termination of the Mosaic law, and of the

exemption of Christians from its obligations, without ever limiting and qualifying the assertion,—without even hinting at a distinction between one part which is abrogated and another which remains in full force. It cannot be said that he had in his mind the Ceremonial law alone, and was alluding merely to the abolition of that; for in the very passages in question, he makes such allusions to *sin*, as evidently show that he had the *moral* law in his mind; as, for instance, where he says, “The law was added because of transgressions:”—“by the law was the knowledge of sin;” with many other such expressions. And it is remarkable, that even when he seems to feel himself pressed with the mischievous practical consequences which either had been, or he is sensible might be, drawn from his doctrines, he never attempts to guard against these by limiting his original assertion;—by declaring that though part of the law was at an end, still, part continued to be binding; but he always inculcates the necessity of moral conduct on some *different* ground: for instance, “What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!” He does not then add, that a part

of the Mosaic law remains in force; but urges this consideration, "How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we *should not serve sin.*" And again, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid! Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey? whether of sin, unto death, or of obedience, unto righteousness" "being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." And such also is his tone in every passage relating to the same subject.

§ 2. Now let us but adopt the obvious interpretation of the Apostle's words, and admit the entire abrogation, according to him, of the Mosaic law;

concluding that it was originally designed for the Israelites alone, and that its dominion over *them* ceased when the Gospel system commenced; and we shall find that this concession does not go a step towards establishing the Antinomian conclusion, that moral conduct is not required of Christians. For it is evident that the natural distinctions of right and wrong, which conscience points out, must remain where they were. These distinctions, not having been introduced by the Mosaic law, cannot, it is evident, be overthrown by its removal; any more than the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, implied the destruction of the Mount Sion whereon it was built. The Apostle does indeed speak in some passages, of the law as having been a guide and instructor in matters of morality; as where he says, "I had not known sin but by the law;" but that this must not be understood, in the fullest extent, as implying that no moral obligation could exist, or could be understood, independent of the Mosaic revelation, is evident not only from the nature of the case, but from his own remarks in the same epistle, relative to "the Gentiles, which have not the law," being capable of "*doing by nature* the

things contained in the law their *conscience* also bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing or else excusing one another;" and of their "knowing" (in cases where they committed sin) "that they who do such shings are worthy of death." To say, therefore, that no part of the Jewish law is binding on Christians, is very far from leaving them at liberty to disregard all moral duties. For, in fact, the very definition of a *moral* duty, *implies* its universal obligation independent of all *enactment*. The precepts respecting sacrifices, for instance, and other ceremonial observances, we call Positive ordinances; meaning, that the things in question became *duties because they were commanded*:—the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself, on the contrary, we call a *moral* precept, on the very ground that this was a thing *commanded because it was right*. And it is evident that what was right or wrong in itself before the law existed, must remain such after it is abrogated. Before the commandments to do no murder, and to honour one's parents, had been delivered from Mount Sinai, Cain was cursed for killing his brother, and Ham for dishonouring his father;

which crimes, therefore, could not cease to be such, at least, as any consequence of the abolition of that law.

Nor need it be feared that to proclaim an exemption from the Mosaic law should leave men without any moral guide, and at a loss to distinguish right and wrong: since, after all, the light of reason is that to which every man *must* be left, in the very interpretation of that law. For Moses, it should be remembered, did not write three distinct books, one of the Ceremonial law, one of the Civil, and a third of the Moral; nor does he hint at any such distinction. When, therefore, any one is told that a *part* of the Mosaic precepts are binding on us, viz. the *moral* ones, if he ask *which are* the Moral precepts, and how to distinguish them from the Ceremonial and the Civil, with which they mingled, the answer must be, that his conscience, if he consult it honestly, will determine that point. So far, consequently, from the moral precepts of the law, being, to the Christian, necessary as a guide to his judgment in determining *what is* right and wrong, on the contrary, this moral judgment is necessary to

determine what *are* the *moral* precepts of Moses.

The study, indeed, of the moral law of Moses is profitable for instruction, and may serve to aid our judgment in some doubtful cases that may occur; provided we are careful to bear in mind all the circumstances under which each precept was delivered. For there is a presumption that what was commanded or prohibited by Moses, is right or wrong in itself, *unless some reason can be assigned*, which makes our case at present different from that of the Israelites;—some circumstance of distinction, which either leaves us more at large than they, or (as is oftener the case) calls for a higher and purer moral practice from us. But to consult a code of moral precepts for *instruction*, is very different from referring to that as a *standard*, and rule of conduct.

If the notion then that such as are not under the Mosaic law, are, on that account, exempt from all moral obligations, be rejected as utterly groundless, and if, consequently, no practical danger or absurdity be involved in the supposition of that law being fully abrogated, the conclusion

that it *is* so abrogated will hardly be any longer open to doubt; being evidently the most agreeable to the Apostle's expressions in their obvious, natural and unrestrained sense. And, indeed, the very law itself indicates, on the face of it, that the whole of its precepts were intended for the Israelites exclusively; (on which supposition they cannot, of course, be binding on Christians,) not only from the intermixture of civil and ceremonial precepts with moral, but from the very terms in which even these are delivered. For instance, there cannot be any duties more clearly of universal obligation, than that of the worship of the one true God alone, and that of honouring parents; yet the precepts for both of these are so delivered as to address them to the children of Israel exclusively: "I am the Lord thy God, who *brought thee out of the land of Egypt*, out of the house of bondage; thou shalt have none other Gods but me." And again, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy *days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*"

The simplest and clearest way then of stating the case with respect to the present question,

is, to lay down, on the one hand, that the Mosaic law was limited both to the nation of the Israelites, and to the period before the Gospel; but, on the other hand, that the natural principles of morality, which, among other things, it inculcates, are, from their own character, of universal obligation;—that, as on the one hand, “no Christian man (as our article expresses it) is free from the observance of those commandments which are called moral,” so, on the other hand, it is not *because* they are commandments of the Mosaic law that he is bound to obey them, but because they *are* moral. Indeed, there are numerous precepts in the laws, for instance, of Solon and Mahomet, from a conformity to which no Christian can pretend to exemption; yet, though we are bound to practise almsgiving and several other duties there enjoined, and to abstain from murder, for instance, and false-witness, which these law-givers forbid, no one would say that a part of the Koran is binding on Christians; since their conduct is determined not by the authority of the Koran, but by the nature of the case.

§ 3. The remarks, however, which have been offered, may perhaps be admitted as *just*, by some who will yet be disposed to doubt their *importance*: “the proposed statement,” they may say, “of the character of a Christian’s moral obligations, differs from the one opposed to it, merely *as a statement*; there is substantially no difference, as long as it is fully admitted that the Christian is not exempt from the rules of morality.” But it should be remembered that the difference between an accurate and an inaccurate statement of any doctrine, and of the grounds on which it rests, is of no slight importance, if not to those who *embrace* the doctrine, at least in reference to such as are disposed to reject or to doubt it. It is giving a manifest advantage to the advocates of error, to maintain a true conclusion in such a form, and on such grounds, as leave it open to unanswerable objections. And this has been particularly the case in the present instance; for the only shadow of probability which has ever appeared to exist on the Antinomian side, has arisen from the question having been made to turn on this point, whether the Mosaic law be

entirely abolished, or not: one who denies that it is, cannot but find a difficulty, at least, in reconciling his position with many passages of Scripture; whereas, if we admit the premiss which the Antinomians contend for, but show how utterly unconnected it is with their extravagant conclusion;—if we show that though the Mosaic law does not bind us, our moral obligations exist quite independent of that law,—the monstrous position that the moral conduct of Christians has nothing to do with their final doom is at once exposed as totally untenable and absurd.

§ 4. It may be thought, however, that real decided speculative Antinomians are so rare, and, moreover, are so far beyond the reach of sober reasoning, that it is scarcely worth while to devise arguments for their refutation. And it must be admitted that the doctrines in question are not by any means prevalent; a circumstance which is very remarkable, and strongly indicates their intrinsic improbability. For a system so evidently favourable to the natural indolence and sinfulness of man, as that which makes our eternal destiny entirely independent of our moral

conduct, could not have failed to become highly popular, among a large class at least, were it not utterly repugnant to reason. A frightfully large portion of the world are undeniably practical Antinomians; *i. e.* they live *as if* they did not expect to be hereafter accountable for their conduct; and yet it will be found, that in theory, very few of these adopt the Antinomian hypothesis, which would be the most effectual in quieting the conscience of the sinner: a circumstance which furnishes most powerful testimony against the truth of that hypothesis.

But however small may be the danger of the Antinomian heresy gaining ground, the right interpretation of Scripture relative to this point, is not, therefore, the less important. The opinion that the Gospel exempts men from moral obligation is not the error which I have had principally in view, but another, much more prevalent—that of suspecting that Paul lends some support to such an opinion; and consequently, of depreciating the authority, or discouraging the study, of his writings. It is on this account chiefly that I have endeavoured to show, in this and two former Essays, how far this

Apostle is from affording any countenance to certain doctrines, the advocates of which usually appeal to his authority.

But another, and perhaps still more important use, may be made of the view which has been now taken. The Apostle, we find, while he earnestly contends for the entire abolition of the Mosaic law, still recognizes the authority of that moral law which is written on man's heart. This consideration not only deprives Antinomians of all shadow of support for their system, and removes the prejudice which might exist against the Apostle, but it also leads us to reflect on his method of inculcating moral duties, and on his reasons for adopting it.

If men are taught to regard the Mosaic law (with the exception of the civil and ceremonial ordinances) as their appointed rule of life, they will be disposed to lower the standard of Christian morality, by *contenting themselves with a literal adherence to the express commands of that law*; or, at least, merely to enlarge that code, by the addition of such precise moral precepts as they find distinctly enacted in the New Testament. Now this was very far from being

the Apostle's view of the christian life. Not only does the Gospel require a morality in many respects higher and more perfect in itself than the law, but it places morality, universally, on higher grounds. Instead of precise *rules*, it furnishes sublime *principles* of conduct; leaving the Christian to apply these, according to his own discretion, in each case that may arise; and thus to be "a law unto himself." Gratitude for the redeeming love of God in Christ, with mingled veneration and affection for the person of our great Master,^a and an exalted emulation, leading us to tread in his steps—an ardent longing to behold his glories, and to enjoy his presence in the world to come—with an earnest effort to prepare for that better world—love towards our brethren for His sake who died for us and them—and, above all, the thought that the Christian is a part of "the temple of the Holy Ghost," who dwelleth in the church—even the "Spirit of Christ, without which we are none of his," a temple which we are bound to keep undefiled;—these, and such as these, are the

^a See *Essays on the Peculiarities of Christianity*, Essay III.

gospel-principles of morality, into a conformity with which the Christian is to fashion his heart and his life; and they are such principles as the Mosaic dispensation could not furnish. The Israelites, as not only living under a revelation which had but a shadow of the good things of the Gospel, but also as a dull, and gross-minded, and imperfectly-civilized people, in a condition corresponding to that of childhood, were in few things left to their own moral discretion, but were furnished with precise rules in most points of conduct. These answered to the exact regulations under which children are necessarily placed, and which are gradually relaxed as they advance towards maturity; not by any means on the ground that good conduct is less required of *men* than of children; but that they are expected to be more capable of regulating their own conduct by their *own* discretion, and of acting upon principle.

§ 5. When, then, the Mosaic code was abolished, we find no other system of rules substituted in its place. Our Lord and his Apostles enforced such duties as were the most liable to be neg-

lected,—corrected some prevailing errors,—gave some particular directions which particular occasions called for,—but laid down no *set of rules* for the conduct of a Christian: they laid down Christian *principles* instead: they sought to implant Christian *dispositions*. And this is the more remarkable, inasmuch as we may be sure, from the nature of man, that precise regulations, even though somewhat tedious to learn, and burdensome to observe, would have been highly acceptable to their converts.^b Hardly any restraint is so irksome to man (*i. e.* to “the natural man”) as to be left to his own discretion, yet still required to regulate his conduct according to certain principles, and to steer his course through the intricate channels of life, with a constant vigilant exercise of his moral judgment. It is much more agreeable to human indolence (though at first sight the contrary might be supposed) to

^b If the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, had been three times as long, and had consisted, not, as it does, of delineations of Christian dispositions, but of a catalogue of minute directions for particular cases, it would doubtless have been more satisfactory to the hearers. But for some further remarks on our Lord’s mode of conveying moral instruction, see Essay VIII.

have a complete system of laws laid down, which are to be observed according to the letter, not to the spirit; and which, as long as a man adheres to them, afford both a consolatory assurance of safety, and an unrestrained liberty as to every point not determined by them; than to be called upon for incessant watchfulness,—careful and candid self-examination,—and studious cultivation of certain moral dispositions.

Accordingly, most, if not all systems of man's devising (whether corruptions of Christianity, or built on any other foundation) will be found, even in what appear their most rigid enactments, to be accommodated to this tendency of the human heart. When Mahomet, for instance, enjoined on his disciples a strict fast during a certain period, and an entire abstinence from wine and from games of chance, and the devotion of a precise portion of their property to the poor, leaving them at liberty, generally, to follow their own sensual and worldly inclinations, he imposed a far less severe task on them than if he had required them constantly to control their appetites and passions, to repress covetousness, and to be uniformly temperate, charitable, and heavenly-

minded. And had Paul been (as a false teacher always will be) disposed to comply with the expectations and wishes which his disciples would naturally form, he would doubtless have referred them to some part of the Mosaic law as their standard of morality, or would have substituted some other system of rules in its place. Indeed there is strong reason to think, (especially from what we find in 1st Corinthians) that something of this nature had actually been desired of him. He seems to have been applied to for more precise rules than he was willing to give; particularly as to the lawfulness of going to idol-feasts, and as to several points relative to marriage and celibacy; concerning which, and other matters, he gives briefly such directions as the occasion rendered indispensable, but breaks off into exhortations to "use this world as not abusing it;" and speedily recurs to the general description of the Christian character, and the inculcation of Christian principles. He will not be induced to enter into minute details of things forbidden, and permitted,—enjoined and dispensed with; and even when most occupied in repelling the suspicion that gospel-liberty exempts

the Christian from moral obligation, instead of retaining or framing anew any system of prohibitions and injunctions, he urges upon his hearers the very consideration of their being exempt from any such childish trammels, as a reason for their aiming at a more perfect holiness of life, on pure and more generous motives: "Sin," he says, "shall not have dominion over you; for *ye are not under the law, but under grace*:" and he perpetually incites them to walk "worthy of their vocation," on the ground of their being "bought with a price," and bound to "live unto Him who died for them;"—as "risen with Christ" to a new life of holiness,—exhorted to "set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth;"—as "living sacrifices" to God;—as "the temple of the Holy Ghost," called upon to keep God's dwelling-place undefiled, and to abound in all "the fruits of the Spirit;"—and as "being delivered from the law, that we should serve in newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

He who seeks then (as many are disposed to do), either in the Old Testament or in the New, for a precise code of laws by which to regulate

his conduct, mistakes the character of our religion. It is indeed an error, and a ruinous one, to think that we may “continue in sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace:” but it is also an error, and a far commoner one, to inquire of the Scriptures in each case that may occur, what we are strictly bound to do or to abstain from, and to feel secure as long as we transgress no distinct commandment.^c But he who seeks with sincerity for Christian *principles* will not fail to find them: if we endeavour, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, to trace on our own heart the delineation of the Christian character which the Scriptures present, and to conform all our actions, and words, and thoughts, to that character, our heavenly Teacher will enable us to “have a right judgment in all things;” and we

^c I am inclined to believe that one reason which makes some persons reluctant to acknowledge the total abolition of the Mosaic law, is the notion that the sanctity of the “Christian Sabbath” depends on the fourth commandment, and that, consequently, the reverence due to the Lord’s day would be destroyed, or impaired, by our admitting the ten commandments to be no longer binding.—On this subject I have offered some remarks in Note A at the end of this volume.

shall be "led by the Spirit" of Christ to follow *his* steps, and to "purify ourselves even as He is pure;" that "when He shall appear, we may be made like unto Him, and may behold him as He is."

ESSAY VI.

ON IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS.



THE importance of obtaining correct, and avoiding erroneous notions, respecting any point of doctrine, is not always to be measured by the intrinsic importance of the doctrine itself, or by the practical consequences *immediately* resulting from this or that view of it. No error can be considered as harmless and insignificant, which tends to put a stumbling-block in the way of believers in the Gospel, and to afford to infidels or heretics the advantage of a plausible objection against its truths. The genuine and fundamental doctrines of Christianity, may become liable to be scoffed at by some, and dreaded or disregarded by others, from their supposed connexion with such as are in fact no part of the gospel-revelation. It then becomes a matter of importance to rectify even those mistakes which

are in themselves of no moment ; since we thus (to use once more the expression of Dr. Paley) “relieve Christianity of a weight that sinks it.” God forbid that the Christian should deny or explain away any thing that *is* a part of his faith, for the sake of moderating the hostility, or escaping the scorn that may be directed against it ; but as little as he is authorized needlessly to expose his religion to that hostility or scorn, by maintaining or allowing to be maintained, as a part of the Christian revelation, any tenet (however intrinsically true) which the Scriptures do not warrant : the same authority which forbids us to “diminish aught” from the word of God, forbids us also to “add thereto.”

That the Apostle Paul’s authority in particular has been appealed to in support of several conclusions which are in fact not taught by him, I have already endeavoured to show ; principally with a view to the removal of that dread or neglect of his writings which has too often been the result.

§ 1. Another doctrine, or set of doctrines rather, there is, in support of which, this

Apostle's authority is principally referred to, and which being (whether deservedly or not) regarded by many with suspicion and alarm, or with disgust and contempt, has thus proved a source of objection, either to the gospel-scheme altogether, or to the teaching of Paul in particular, of which such tenets have been supposed to form a part. I allude to the doctrine of "imputed sin," and "imputed righteousness," as set forth by some writers, who represent it as the very key-stone of the Christian system.

I purposely abstain from referring to any authors in particular; because the proper character of a calm inquiry after truth, is so liable to be lost in that of a controversy with some individual or party; and the discussion of any question thus becomes, though more interesting perhaps to some minds, yet less edifying; since, after all, the object ultimately proposed should be, not the confutation of this or that theologian, but the ascertainment of the genuine doctrines of our religion; which must rest, not on any merely human authority, but on that of the Holy Scriptures.

The system at present in question, as far as

I have been able to collect its import, may be briefly stated thus: that when our first parents had fallen from their state of innocence, they transmitted to all their posterity (over and above the proneness to sin which we are born with, and our liability to natural death,) the guilt also of the actual transgression committed by Adam: this being imputed to every one of his posterity: for, it is said, he being the federal head or representative of the whole human species, his act is considered as theirs to all intents and purposes; and each descendant of Adam is considered by his Almighty Judge as actually guilty, from his birth, of the very sin of having eaten of the forbidden fruit; and is, for that sin, sentenced not merely to undergo natural death, but also everlasting punishment in the next world, independently of any sins committed by himself.

This is not indeed always the sense in which the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and their consequent punishment, are spoken of; there are some who understand by the expression, merely, the forfeiture of immortality—the liability to temporal death; though it is

perhaps rather an incorrect use of language, to apply the term *punishment* to the absence of that immortality which was never our's: the *human race* indeed, taken collectively, so as to *include* our first parents, may be said to have *lost* immortal life; but each *individual* of their posterity, being born mortal, cannot, without great laxity of language, be said to be *punished* by being excluded from immortality.

The doctrine, however, in the sense before stated, has been often expressly maintained, and much oftener indirectly implied, and assumed as indubitable.

Then, to relieve mankind from this sentence, and to procure for them immortal happiness in heaven, our Saviour Christ, it is said, not only in his death offered up an effectual sacrifice for the sins of the whole world,—bearing in his own person the punishment due both to the imputed transgression of Adam, and to the actual sins of men,—but also, during his abode on earth, *performed for them* those good works of perfect obedience to the law, both ceremonial, civil, and moral, which are *imputed* to true believers in him, and considered as theirs: even as

the transgression of Adam is imputed to all his natural descendants. Thus, and thus only, it is said, could the evil introduced by Adam's transgression be (as far as respects the adoptive children of God) effectually repaired: for as Adam was the representative of the whole human race, so that his sin is, by imputation, made theirs, and they, all and each, thus lay under the sentence of eternal punishment, so it was necessary that the obedience and personal holiness of Christ, who stands as the representative of his faithful servants, should be, in like manner, imputed to them, and thus give them a title to eternal happiness:—that he should, in short, not only by his death undergo the punishment due to man from God, but also, in his life, fulfil the righteousness due to God from man; in each instance, suffering and performing what he did, vicariously,—*for*, and in the stead of, his people; who are thence regarded as having themselves both paid the penalty of sin, and also performed perfect obedience to the divine laws; both having been accomplished by their substitute and representative. And some there are, who go so far as to maintain that as God

imputes to believers the good works of Jesus Christ, and transfers to them the merit of his obedient life, so He also imputed to Jesus, at the time of his crucifixion, the actual guilt of those sins for which he suffered, and regarded Him, for the time being, as the actual transgressor; "bearing our sins" not only in respect of the penalty of them, but of their intrinsic guilt, and the divine wrath^a against it. This, however, is not, I believe, held by all who maintain the imputation of Adam's sin, and of Christ's obedience. Some other slighter variations of statement are to be found, as might be expected, in the works of different authors; but such, in the main, as I have described, is the system taught, not in abstruse theological disquisitions merely, but in several popular treatises and sermons; and taught, as the very foundation of christian faith; of which indeed it must, if true, form no insignificant part.

^a There are many writers who never think of reminding their readers, and, indeed, appear to have themselves gradually learnt to forget, that *wrath* is attributed to the Deity only in a figurative, not a literal sense.—See King's *Discourse on Predestination*.

That it is paradoxical,—remote from all we should naturally have expected,—and startling to our untutored feelings, cannot be questioned: this is, however, no reason why it may not be true; or why, if true, we should shrink from receiving it; since God's "ways are not as our ways;" and since, incapable as we are of estimating his counsels, it is for us, not to question, but to receive, whatever He may have proposed to us. It *is* a reason, however, why we should inquire for, and expect, the more full and precise revelation on such a point. What is discoverable by unassisted human reason, we must not expect to find revealed *at all* in Scripture. Such things again as, though not discoverable by reason, are yet conformable to its suggestions, and contain no mysterious difficulty,—of these, we may receive satisfactory assurance even in a single passage, or in a few short hints; but any doctrine which, like that now in question, is wholly at variance with every notion we should naturally be led to form, we may be sure will be revealed, if revealed at all, in the fullest and most decisive language. The doctrine, too, which I have been considering, must, if it belong to the gospel-

scheme, be as important as it is mysterious: it must be the very key, as it were, to eternal happiness; since, according to this view, it is only through the obedience of Christ imputed to us, that we can have any claim or hope to be admitted to the glories of his heavenly kingdom.

§ 2. It is not once or twice, therefore,—it is not obscurely or obliquely,—that we might expect to find Paul speaking to his converts of this imputed sin, and imputed obedience. As the foundation of salutary dread, and of consolatory hope,—as connected most intimately with every question relative to the punishments and rewards of the next world,—we might expect him to make the most explicit declarations respecting a point of such moment,—to dwell on it copiously and earnestly,—to recur to it in almost every page.

Now when we proceed to the actual examination of Scripture, do we find these most reasonable expectations confirmed? Far otherwise: it is not, perhaps, going too far, to say that the whole system is made to rest on a particular interpretation of *one* single text (Rom. v. 19),

“As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous.” For though there are other passages which have been considered as alluding to and confirming the tenet in question, there is none that could, without great violence, be construed into an express declaration of it.

The passage in question is one which we cannot reasonably hope to interpret aright, if we contemplate it as an insulated proposition;—if we do not take into account the general tenour of the Apostle’s teaching. Now, it is most important to observe, that frequent as are his allusions (as might be expected) to the Christian’s redemption, and acceptableness to God, through Christ; the reference is made, throughout, to his *death*,—to his *cross*,—to his *blood*,—to his *sufferings*,—to his *sacrifice* of himself, as the meritorious cause of our salvation; not to the righteousness of his life imputed to believers;—the transfer of the merit of his good works. For instance, “He hath reconciled us to God, in the body of his flesh *through death*.” “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth

to be a propitiation, through faith in his *blood*:" "He hath brought us nigh to God, and made Him at peace with us, through the *blood of the cross*:" "We are sanctified through the *offering of the body* of Jesus Christ once for all;"—besides numerous other passages to the same purpose. Frequent again as are all the allusions to the pure and perfect holiness of our Saviour's life, we nowhere find this spoken of as imputed to Christians, and made theirs by transfer of merit, but always as qualifying Him to be, on the one hand, an example to Christians, and on the other, both the Victim and the Priest, of spotless purity;—as constituting Him the true Lamb without blemish,—“the innocent blood,” which “taketh away the sin of the world,” because He who offered it had no need of atonement for himself. For instance, “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself *without spot* to God, cleanse your bodies from dead works to serve the living God?” “Such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” In these and many other such passages, in which the personal holiness of Christ is spoken of, and

spoken of too in reference to our salvation, it is not said that the obedience of Christ is imputed to us, and the merit of his good works transferred to us, (which we might surely have expected to find there mentioned, had it been designed to teach such a doctrine); but, on the contrary, it seems rather to be implied that his obedience was imputed to Himself as necessary to qualify him for the great sacrifice of atonement.

And the language of Scripture on this point coincides with the most sound moral judgment; which indicates that nothing short of a life of un-sinning virtue could have made Him, Himself, acceptable, and fit for his great office; that, in short, it behoved Him "to fulfil all righteousness," in order that He might be a spotless Victim, and an undefiled Priest: that in *suffering* indeed an accursed death, He did more than could be required of an innocent person on his own account; and that, therefore, He died, "the just for the unjust;" but that his *being* just,—the perfect obedience of his *life*,—could not be more than requisite to constitute Him perfect as a man. I speak, of course, of his obedient life in reference to his *human* nature alone; in respect of which He always

declared, "My Father is greater than I;" to speak of his *obedience* considered as a Divine Person, would be at least approaching very near to the Arian doctrine;^b since all *obedience* necessarily implies a superior.

^b There is, I fear, in many Christians a strong habitual leaning of the mind to this view of the Scripture doctrines; though they are unconscious of it from their having *formally* condemned Arianism, and distinctly asserted the equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father: forgetting that this is no security against a tinge being given to their ordinary course of thought on the subject,—a tendency *practically* to contemplate three distinct Divine Beings, the second inferior to the first, and the third to both. That it is possible for men to become something very near indeed to Arianism without knowing it, we have a curious instance in ecclesiastical history. In the early stages of Arianism, a confession of faith was agreed upon* which was satisfactory to all parties, till some time after, the Arians began to boast of their triumph, and to point out the sanction which the formula adopted gave to their doctrine; and then "the Church," says Jerome, " marvelled to find itself unexpectedly become Arian." Something of the same kind, on a smaller scale, took place very recently among ourselves. The discovery of Milton's system of theology, startled many persons by its avowed Arianism, who had been accustomed to commend his poems for their sound theology; though they convey the very same views, stated almost as plainly

* At Rimini, A. D. 360.

Surely, then, when we read that "by the obedience of (the) one, many (the many) shall be as, in a poem, they could be. Numerous passages indeed may be cited from the "Paradise Lost," which cannot be censured as heterodox, because they are little more than metrical versions of portions of *Scripture*. But such passages do not necessarily prove any thing, one way or the other, respecting a writer's opinions: since the *Scriptures themselves* appear, to an Arian to speak Arianism,—to a Socinian, Socinianism, &c. But that there is in the poem a general leaning such as I have just alluded to, must I think be evident, except to those who, from various causes, and, among the rest, from an early and habitual study of Milton, have themselves imperceptibly imbibed similar notions.

When I speak however of Milton as Arian, I do not mean that he precisely coincided with Arius: much less, designed to enrol himself among his disciples. I mean merely to designate the *kind* of error towards which his language tends. Milton certainly was "nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri;" well inclined to think for himself, though not always to "think soberly."

These instances are amply sufficient to prove, at the very least, such a possibility as I have alluded to.

Probably, indeed, the whole doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers, may be traced in a great degree to these semi-arian views. Men are apt to conclude that the "righteousness of *Christ*" must denote something distinct from the indwelling of the *Holy Spirit*, bringing forth fruit unto holiness; because they

made (or constituted, — *κατασταθήσονται*) righteous," the presumption is strongly in favour of such an interpretation as shall accord with the declaration that we are "justified by his *blood*." Now such an interpretation is not only allowable, but is even, I may say, suggested by the Apostle himself in another passage, in which, speaking of Christ's *death*, he uses the very corresponding word to (*ὑπακοή*) "obedience" in this place: Christ, he says, "became *obedient* (*ὑπήκοος*) to *death*, even the death of the cross." His death, indeed, is more than once referred to in this point of view; namely, as a part, and as the great and consummating act of that submissive and entire *obedience* which he rendered throughout to his Father's will. For instance, in our Lord's own words just before He suffered, "not my will, but thine be done:"

fear to confound together, what they habitually, though unconsciously, consider two different agents. Whereas Scripture, if they would submit to be implicitly led by it, promises that Christ will come unto his servants and "make his abode with them;"—that "hereby know we that He (Christ) dwelleth in us, by his Spirit which He hath given us;" and that "the Lord is the (not "that" as our translation has it) Spirit."

“Lo, I come to *do thy will*, O God;” “when He suffered He threatened not, but *submitted* Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.”

Then, with respect to the imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants, it might, as I have said, be expected that, if true, it would be frequently and fully set forth. But at any rate it could hardly fail to be mentioned on those occasions where the Apostle is occupied in proving and insisting on the universal necessity of a Redeemer, and the inevitable ruin of mankind without an atoning sacrifice. Now this plainly is his object in the opening of this very Epistle, (to the Romans) which is generally regarded as the most systematic of all that he wrote. What then is Paul's procedure? He dwells at large on the *actual sins* of men; he gives a copious and shocking detail of the enormities of the Gentile world, into which they had plunged in defiance of their own natural *conscience*; and then expatiates on the sins of which the Jews had been guilty, in violation of the *law* in which they trusted. How needless would all this have been for one who maintained the doctrine of imputed sin! No one, indeed, denies that men do commit actual sin; but the

hypothesis I have been speaking of would have cut the argument short: on that supposition it would have been sufficient to say at once, that Adam's transgression being imputed to all his posterity, so that they are all regarded as guilty of his act, they must be, in consequence, whether sinful or innocent,—whether more or less sinful,—in their own persons, doomed to eternal perdition, unless redeemed from this imputed guilt. Nor does the passage I have appealed to, stand alone in this respect. Numerous as are the denunciations of divine judgment against sin, all concur in making the reference not to the imputed sin of our first parents, but to the actual sins of men: none of them warrants the conclusion that any one is liable to punishment (I mean in the next world) for any one's sins but his own.

§ 3. It should be observed also, that there is an especial reason for interpreting that part of the Epistle I have been alluding to^c by reference to other parts of Scripture: which is, that it is not the Apostle's *object*, in this place, to declare

^c Rom. v. 19.

or establish the doctrine of original sin, and of our deliverance from its consequences by Christ our Saviour. It is plain from the context that these points are established only incidentally; the main drift of his argument being to set forth the *universality* of the redemption,—as being co-extensive with the evil introduced at the Fall, which it was designed to remedy. The Jewish converts, to whom he seems to be principally addressing himself, were disposed, by their ancient national prejudices, to limit the benefits of the Messiah's advent to their own people: the great and revolting mystery to *them*, was, “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs:” in opposition to which exclusive spirit he infers the universal redemption accomplished by Christ, from the universality of that loss and corruption which He undertook to repair: “*as* in Adam *all* die, even *so* in Christ shall *all* be made alive:” “*as* by one man's disobedience many (the many *i. e.* all) were made (or constituted, *κατεστάθησαν*,) sinners, even so by the obedience of the one shall the many,” (*i. e.* not the Jews only but the whole race of mankind, as many as believe) “be made righteous.” Now there is no doubt that such an oblique allusion

to any doctrine does not only establish it, but establish it even more decidedly than an express assertion: since it implies that it is a known and undisputed truth; but still the difference between the two cases is not unimportant: we are not to look for the same full and clear *exposition* of any point of faith in those passages where it is merely alluded to incidentally, as in those wherein the object is to declare and explain it. And some passage, in which it is the direct object to reveal and inculcate the doctrine now in question, would doubtless have been appealed to by its advocates, had any such passage existed. But fundamentally important as this truth must be, if it be a truth, no portion of Scripture can be found whose immediate and primary design is to declare it. The sinfulness of human nature is, indeed, abundantly set forth; but not the imputation to one man of the actual transgression committed by another; our salvation through Christ is earnestly dwelt on; but it is "through faith in his *blood*." Nay, there is mention made of imputation and non-imputation; but not of *one* man's act or desert to *another*. God is spoken of as "not imputing to men their

trespasses," (which by the way would amount to nothing, if He still imputed to them the trespasses of another); and we are told, "faith (our own) shall be imputed to us for righteousness."

And this should teach us how to interpret the passages in which we are said to be made "the righteousness of God in Christ," and He, to be "made sin for us;" viz. not that he was considered in the sight of God as actually sinful, but that He was made a "sin-offering" for us; *ἁμαρτία*, which is literally, "sin," being commonly used by the Septuagint translators in the sense of a sin-offering; and again, when we are said to be made righteous through his "obedience unto death,"—and to be "made the righteousness of God in Him: and He again is said to be "made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," it is not meant that there is an imputation to believers of the righteousness of Christ's life, as if it were theirs, any more than that the *wisdom* of Christ is imputed to them, or the *redemption* which He effected is regarded as effected by them; but that He purchased by the sacrifice of Himself all these benefits for

men; for those, *i. e.* who should by faith be admitted to be partakers of them;—that when He had been “delivered for our sins, He “rose again for our justification;” *i. e.* “ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, that the Lord God might dwell among them:” viz. that his Holy Spirit, whose temple we are, might reside in, and sanctify our hearts, and *impart to us wisdom and righteousness*, to be practically displayed in our lives.^d And since without this holy guidance our own feeble and depraved nature could never bring forth what the Apostle calls “the fruits of the Spirit,” nor follow the steps of Christ, this may well be called the “righteousness of Christ,” or the “righteousness of God in Christ.” For “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:” “if any man keep my saying, my Father will love him, and *we* we will come unto him and make our abode in him.” “Little children,” says the Apostle John, “let no man deceive you; he that *doeth righteousness* is righteous, even as He is righteous.” “They that are Christ’s,” says Paul, “have

^d See Whitby on this subject.

crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts ;” “ if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” “ If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall *live* ; for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

§ 4. From the consideration then of these passages of Scripture which have been adduced, as well as of many more to the same purpose which might be appealed to if needful, I cannot but conclude that that system of imputed sin and righteousness, which I have been considering, is altogether fanciful and groundless. It has indeed at first sight a sort of compactness, coherency, and consistency of parts, which gives it, till closely scrutinized, an air of plausibility ; but this very circumstance should in any case put us the more carefully on our guard ; for there is no more common error in many departments of study, and especially in theology, than the prevalence of a love of *system* over the love of *truth*. Men are often so much captivated by the aspect of what seems to them a regular, beautiful, and well-connected theory, as to adopt

it hastily without inquiring, in the *outset*, how far it is conformable to facts or to scriptural authority; and thus, often on one or two passages of Scripture, have built up an ingenious and consistent scheme, of which the far greater part is a tissue of their own reasonings and conjectures.

The whole subject indeed of justification has been involved in great, and, I cannot but think, needless, perplexity, by the practice formerly alluded to (Essay III.) of first affixing (which may be allowable)^e a strict technical sense to each of the principal words that have been employed in Scripture, and then (which is not allowable) interpreting the word, whenever it is found in the Sacred Writers

^e Perhaps, however, it would have been better if, from the very first, *no* scriptural terms had been introduced into systems of theology. Some have objected to the word "Trinity," and a few others, on the ground that they are *not found in Scripture*: this appears to me their chief recommendation; since in this case all danger is effectually avoided of misinterpreting Scripture in the way I am describing. As it is, one of our best safeguards against this danger would be, to *vary* from time to time the language of our expositions of Scripture doctrines.

themselves, according to such precise definition; instead of regarding their works as popular, not scientific, and seeking for the meaning of their expressions, in each case, from the context.

Thus, in the present instance, if three or four perhaps of those who are accounted sound divines, should be consulted as to the doctrine of Justification, it is not unlikely they would give as many different accounts of it. All would agree as to the importance of the doctrine; but some perhaps would lay down two Justifications, others, only one; and among these there would be found great discrepancies; and yet all probably would be found, in their general views of the Christian scheme, to arrive at nearly the same practical results. It is hardly to be supposed indeed that there can be so much difficulty (to the unlearned, impossibility) as this discrepancy would seem to imply, in ascertaining from Scripture, "what we must do to be saved." And is there not therefore ground to suspect that many divines have been unconsciously involved in embarrassing disputes about words, from expecting in the Sacred Writers a more scientific accuracy and uniformity of language than they ever aimed at?

When one of the Apostles speaks to men of the *condemnation* for sin, from which they were to seek a way to escape, he naturally uses the word *δικαιώθηναι*, to be “justified,” in the sense of *acquittal*;—their “not having their trespasses imputed to them.” (Acts xiii. 38, 39. Rom. iii. 25. Rom. v. 9.) When again he alludes to the *defilement* of sin, analogous to the ceremonial impurities which, under the Levitical Law, excluded men from partaking of its sacred ordinances, he as naturally uses “justified” to signify their being accounted *clean*,—regarded as God’s *holy people*, and admitted without profanation to approach Him, in the spiritual service of the new covenant. (Rom. v. 1, 2.) When again the Jews prided themselves on their law, as their guide to a moral and religious life, and as “justifying,” that is, *making men good*, and fit to obtain heavenly rewards, he sets forth the vainness of that expectation; since, even if the law had had the “better hope” of the Gospel,—the sanction of eternal rewards,—still, it could not justify those who had not strictly obeyed all its precepts; which man, left to his natural strength, had never fully accomplished; (Rom. ii. 25, and vii. 22, 23.)

insisting, that we are to be justified, that is, *made good men*, through faith in Christ, which admits us to a participation of his Spirit, (Rom. v. 12), even the Spirit which “helpeth our infirmities,” (Rom. viii. 26), and “worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Hence he speaks of Christ as being “delivered for our sins, and *rising again* for our justification,” (Rom. iv. 25, and vi. 4); that is, that when He “ascended up on high, He received gifts for men,” namely, “that the Lord God might *dwell among them.*” Hence also he occasionally speaks of the “*law of faith;*” and universally contrasts, not (as many are apt to suppose) *good works* with faith, but faith with the *Mosaic law;* as leading more effectually to good works, (Rom. viii. 4, 11, 12, 13, and Tit. iii. 5, and 1 Cor. vi. 11), by obtaining for us the aid of the Holy Spirit, of which they are the fruits. The chief cause indeed of this Apostle’s giving so prominent a place to the word “justification,” may be found in the peculiar circumstances under which he preached; especially when addressing the Jews, and those infected with their prejudices; who were always hoping to be justified

by the law; (imperfectly as they observed it;) that is, made at least sufficiently righteous to inherit the rewards of a future life.^f

§ 5. It may be said, however, that the system which has been treated of in this Essay, is, even if unsound, not practically dangerous, and, therefore, not one which needs to be refuted. That it has been held by pious and worthy men, I am well aware; nor would I contend that it had any tendency to make them otherwise, and that their notions on this point were inconsistent with their religious and moral characters. But it would be rash to conclude thence, that their error, if it be one, must be altogether harmless. Nothing is harmless which may put a stumbling-block in the path of any sincere Christian: nothing is harmless that tends to give an undue advantage to unbelievers,—to disgust some with what they are told is the orthodox faith, and to furnish others with objections against it, by inserting doctrines which the Scriptures do not warrant:—nothing is harmless that leads to a depreciation, a dread, or a neglect of the divine

^f See Note ^(b), p. 199.

instructions of the Apostle Paul. And such is most remarkably the case in respect of the system I have now been considering. It is a favourite point of attack to the infidel, and the heretic; who pretend, and probably believe themselves, to have exposed to contempt the great doctrines of the Atonement and the Divinity of Christ, by exposing the chimerical pretensions of doctrines which are taught in conjunction with these, and represented as parts of the same system. And in others, the too-prevailing neglect of Paul's writings, as neither intelligible, nor safe, nor a profitable study to any but theologians of the most profound learning and wisdom, is fostered, by attributing to him doctrines more likely to bewilder and mislead, than to be applicable to any practical benefit.

Mysterious, no doubt, it is, that the sacrifice of "the innocent blood" should be accepted as an atonement for sin; but in this case we know that the sacrifice was *voluntary*;—"I lay down my life; no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." Christ, of his own accord, offered his life as "a ransom for many." But when we are told of eternal punishment de-

nounced against men for the actual sin of Adam, and this, not by their own *voluntary choice*, or by any act of their own, but by the absolute decree of the Almighty Judge, our ideas of the divine justice, whether drawn from reason or from Scripture, cannot but be shocked. When again, we find Christ spoken of as suffering for us and in our stead, so that "by his stripes we are healed," though we cannot comprehend indeed, this act of mysterious mercy, we do comprehend that "there is now, therefore, no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus," but that his suffering *in our stead* exempts his faithful followers from suffering in their own persons. But when men are told that the righteousness of Christ's life is imputed to believers, and considered as *their* merit, they are startled at the want of correspondence of this doctrine with the former, and its apparent inconsistency with the injunctions laid upon us to "bring forth the fruits of the Spirit" unto everlasting salvation, because "God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure," while we are also told that Christ has already fulfilled all moral obligations *in our stead*. The Antinomian system

is unhappily the only one which surmounts this incongruity; and its advocates accordingly have availed themselves of the advantage:—Since, say they, Christ suffered for us, and in our stead, so as to exempt us from suffering ourselves, by parity of reasoning, the good works which He performed,—the personal holiness He possessed,—being imputed to us, as performed for us and in our stead, must, in like manner, exempt us from any such performance of our own.*

I do not however mean to contend, that the generality of those who maintain the system in question, are tainted, or are even in danger of tainting the minds of others, with the Antinomian heresy. It is enough to say, that if they bring Paul's writings into disrepute or disuse, by attributing to him, without sufficient grounds, doctrines which appear to lead to such pernicious consequences, they are answerable for the evil thence resulting. Whenever we teach for gospel-truths any thing which the Gospel does not warrant, we are answerable for the effects produced, not only on those who adopt our opinions, but also on those who dissent from them.

* See Whitby on this subject.

Let Paul, as well as the rest of the Sacred Writers, be studied with diligence and candour, and without any bias in favour of an ingenious and consistent theory, the offspring of our own speculations; let the student “prove all things, and hold fast that which is right;” and to this end let him observe the wise maxim of admitting no conclusion which is not, itself, as well as the premises it is drawn from, agreeable to the word of God. And let the general tenour of each work in particular, and of the Scriptures altogether, be carefully attended to, instead of dwelling exclusively on detached passages: and then we may boldly and constantly maintain every doctrine which we find to be really revealed, however mysterious, or however unacceptable.

We are, in reality, not preaching the Gospel, unless we both preach the *whole* Gospel, and, likewise, *nothing but* the Gospel; nor can we hope for the Apostle’s consolatory trust of being “pure from the blood of all men,” unless, like him, we declare to men “*all* the counsel of God,” and (as a part of the christian faith) *nothing but* “the counsel of God.”

ESSAY VII.

ON APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS IN SCRIPTURE.

§ 1. It has been above remarked (Essay II.) that the expression of the Apostle Peter relative to the "things hard to be understood," in Paul's writings, has been employed to furnish an excuse at least, if not a reason, for neglecting and keeping out of sight those writings; as being, to the generality of Christians, both too abstruse to be studied with any profit, and too liable to perversion to be approached with safety. And the principle of avoiding altogether whatever is hard to be understood, or liable to be wrested to a destructive purpose, naturally extends itself, as indeed the passage in question cannot but seem to warrant, to other parts of Scripture as well as to Paul's Epistles; till the result ensues of an exclusive attention to certain

narratives of fact and plain moral precepts; while all that relates to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, is left, as matter of mere speculative inquiry, in the hands of learned theologians.

Of the precise extent of such an error, no one individual can be an adequate judge; but that it is not imaginary—that it does prevail to a considerable degree—is a conclusion which I am convinced no one will doubt who has made extensive and careful observations. Indeed there is in the human mind a kind of indolence which tends to produce this consequence. The remark of the intelligent historian of Greece, will remain as true as ever while human nature continues the same; that “the generality of men are averse to labour in the investigation of truth, and ready rather to acquiesce in what is set before them.” The Church of Rome only took advantage of, what she could not have created, this disposition of the many to leave the task of searching the Scriptures to the learned few,—to let *them* acquire knowledge, instead of themselves,—and to acquiesce without inquiry into whatever these should promulgate. The Roman-

catholic Clergy were thence looked to, not as leaders and assistants to the laity in the study of Scripture, but as their substitutes; and the word of God became, in consequence, a prohibited book to the great body of Christians; who were thus left to the guidance of men often themselves ignorant of Scripture, but whose ignorance the others had lost the means of detecting. This state of things, however, no priestcraft could have brought about, had not the dread of laborious investigation prepared the way for it.^a

That there *are* difficulties in many parts of Scripture,—as great perhaps in Paul's writings as in any,—and that there is consequent danger of mischievous perversion, is undeniable; and is indeed what analogy would prepare us to expect: for if the Scriptures could be properly understood without any trouble, and were incapable of perversion to bad purposes, they would be extremely unlike the rest of God's gifts.

^a I have treated of this subject more at large in a Sermon on the Christian Priesthood, subjoined to the second Edition of the Bampton Lectures.

But the difficulties of Scripture, as well as the danger of misinterpreting it, are evidently an additional reason for diligence in the study of it. And Peter's implied *censure* of those who are unlearned (that is, ill acquainted with the religion of Jesus Christ) and (as will naturally follow) unstable, and likely to be "blown about with every wind of doctrine," should operate as a caution, not against the study of the Scriptures, but against the faults which would lead us to wrest them to our destruction.

To examine into all the difficulties of Scripture, or even of Paul's writings alone, would be a task to which perhaps the whole life of any single individual would be scarcely adequate: to lay down all the rules that might be applicable in such a task, would far exceed my present limits; but it may be worth while to offer a few remarks on some of the most important, and, at the same time, most commonly overlooked, of those *principles* which should be kept in view in the study of the doctrinal parts of Scripture; and the neglect of which has aggravated, if not produced, many of the difficulties complained of (in Paul's writings especially,)

and has led, in many instances, to perplexity, if not to error.

§ 2. (1.) It is evidently of great importance, with a view to the right interpretation of any author, to consider, and to understand fully, his general drift and design. If we are mistaken in this point, the utmost diligence and the utmost ingenuity may sometimes answer no other purpose than to lead us the further astray. Now it is, I conceive, not uncommon to consider Revelation as designed, in part, to convey to us speculative truths;—to increase our knowledge concerning divine things as they are in their own intrinsic nature;—in short, to teach us not merely *religion* properly so called, (that is, the *relations between* God and man,) but also what may be stiled *theological philosophy*,—a certain branch of abstract science.^b All men, it is true, acknowledge revelation to *have* a practical purpose; but it is conceivable that this might still be the case, though it were not *confined* to such purposes;—it might, conceivably, propose to our belief, both

^b Hinds. "Rise and Early Progress of Christianity." Intro. p. 31.

practical truths, and speculative truths also, distinct from each other; and such a notion of the christian revelation, may, without being distinctly avowed, be nevertheless practically entertained and acted upon.

(2.) Nearly allied to, and resulting from, such a view of the Scriptures, viz. as being, more or less, of the nature of a philosophical system, is the expectation (before alluded to) of finding in them a regular technical vocabulary;—a set of terms confined, each, to its own appropriate sense, in which it shall be uniformly and precisely employed. This might indeed take place in a purely practical system; but in any case where speculative scientific truth was the object, it would be altogether requisite; and the more the Scriptures are viewed in this light, the more the student will be disposed to regard each word and phrase as bearing throughout a fixed and peculiar sense; just as might be expected in a creed—catechism,—system of articles,—code of ethics, or any such composition.

(3.) In any scientific treatise, employing its own appropriate technical terms, any single detached passage will usually be sufficiently intelligible, to

one who is familiar with the definition of those terms. It may, indeed, need others to *establish its truth*, or to be combined with it for the proof of ulterior truths; but not, to ascertain its meaning. In proportion, therefore, as the Scriptures are regarded as approaching to the character of a philosophical system, furnished with a regular technical phraseology, in the same degree will the student be disposed to build conclusions on insulated passages, without thinking it necessary in every instance to refer to the context, and to explain one part of Scripture by others.

(4.) Lastly, one who has been accustomed to take in any degree such a view of Scripture as I have been describing, (and there are many who *are* disposed to do so, though without acknowledging it, even to themselves,) will, of course, when they meet with passages which seem at variance with each other, be inclined (if, indeed, they are not absolutely driven into doubts as to the truth of some portion of Scripture) to regard these merely in the light of *difficulties* designed for the trial of their faith; which they must surmount as well as they can, by explaining

away such texts as are most adverse to their own conclusions; while they dwell on every one that favours them; softening down, if I may so speak, by their interpretation, every other part of Scripture, into a conformity with the hypothesis which they have built on some selected portion.

It is true, indeed, that no one ever professed a design of studying Scripture on such a plan as has been described; but it is no less true that many have at all times evinced in various degrees a tendency to slide into it insensibly;—that to these causes, in great measure, may be traced almost all the erroneous systems of faith which have at various times prevailed;—and that many of the difficulties complained of, especially the *discrepancies* between the several parts of Scripture, and particularly between the Apostle Paul and the other Sacred Writers, have been either produced or greatly aggravated by this mistaken mode of studying the Sacred Records.

That the Scriptures contain nothing like a philosophical system, set forth in technical phraseology, and that we must not expect to understand them by confining our attention to certain

insulated passages, and disregarding or explaining away the rest, but must interpret each by the context, and from the rest of Scripture—these maxims appear so obvious when distinctly stated, that we are apt to be the less sensible, what vigilant care is requisite in order to conform to them steadily in practice. It may be allowable, therefore, to offer some brief remarks on each of the points that have been just alluded to.

§ 3. (1.) That the natural desire of knowledge for its own sake, tends to influence men's judgment respecting a divine revelation, in which they are apt to seek, not merely practical truths, but the gratification of speculative curiosity, I have elsewhere taken occasion to remark^c All pretended revelations accordingly, and legendary tales of saints,—all the disquisitions concerning things divine, of the heathen philosophers, and, I fear we may add, of some Christian theologians, however otherwise different, concur in this, that they relate in great

^c Essay IV. First Series.

measure, if not exclusively, to the nature and attributes and works of the Supreme Being, as He is in Himself;—to the real state of things in the invisible world, however unconnected with human conduct: while *our* revelation is characterized, as I there observed, by abstaining from speculative points,—by refusing to gratify mere curiosity,—by teaching, in short, not philosophy, but what is properly called Religion, — the knowledge, *i. e.* of the *relations* between God and man, and of the practical truths thence resulting.

Those, therefore, are not likely to interpret Scripture rightly, who are not content with relative truths, but seek to ascertain, in each instance, the real state of things; the knowledge of which, in many cases probably, could not be imparted to us with our present faculties; and is often withheld, where it might. Such a student is likely to mistake the sense of the Sacred Writers, from not judging aright what kind of instruction it is that they design to impart; his religious notions are “spoiled through *philosophy* and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” And from such a view of the

Scriptures, the conclusion that the doctrinal parts of them are unnecessary, unprofitable, and unsafe, to the great mass of Christians, will be the natural result. Both the learned and the unlearned will agree in taking this view of the Scripture-doctrines; the presumptuous inquiries of the one class, have a direct tendency to sanction and foster the indolent indifference of the other.^d

^d The sense of the term "mystery," as employed by the Sacred Writers, is very commonly mistaken; and the mistake has been a source of much error.—See Parkhurst's Lexicon to the New Testament, on the word *Μυστήριον*.

The ancient heathen had certain sacred rites, in which were disclosed, to those "initiated," certain secrets, which were carefully to be kept concealed from the uninitiated, (*ἀμύητοι*), the great mass of the professors of the religion. The Apostle naturally makes allusion to these, by the use of the word "mystery," to denote those designs of God's providence, and those doctrinal truths, which had been kept concealed from mankind "till the fulness of time" was come, "but now were *made manifest*" to believers. And he frequently adverts to one important circumstance in the Christian mysteries, which distinguishes them from those of paganism; viz. that while these last were revealed only to a chosen few, the gospel-mysteries, on the contrary, were made known to all who would listen to and obey the truth; whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, barbarian or Greek.

(2.) And as nothing was further from the design of Paul and the other Sacred Writers, than to frame a philosophical system, so, they

All Christians were "initiated" (*συμμύσται*, as one of the ancient Fathers calls them), and those only remained in darkness who wilfully shut their eyes: "if our gospel be *hid*, it is hid to them that are *lost*, whom the prince of this world hath *blinded*."

Now our ordinary use of the word *mystery* conveys the notion of something that we cannot understand at all, and which it is fruitless to inquire into. I am not *censuring* this use of the word; but if we interpret according to our own usage, an author who employs it differently, it is plain we shall be misled. Both we and the Sacred Writers, indeed, understand by the word, something hidden from one party and known to another, (for we suppose all mysteries to be known to God); but there is this difference; that *we* use the word *in reference* to the party from whom the knowledge is *withheld*; the Apostles, in reference to those to whom the knowledge is *revealed*. Such an expression as, "this is a mystery to us," conveys to *us* the idea that it is something we do not and cannot understand; to Paul it would convey the idea that it is something which "now is made manifest," and which we are, therefore, called upon to contemplate and study; even as his office was "to make known the mystery of the gospel." Not that he meant to imply that we are able fully to understand the divine dispensations; but it is not *in reference* to this their inscrutable character that he calls them mysteries, but the reverse; they are

aimed at no philosophical regularity of language; their writings, as I have before remarked, were popular, not scientific; they expressed their meaning on each occasion, in the words which on each occasion, suggested themselves as best fitted to convey it to readers of plain understanding; and these terms are to be understood, though not indeed always in their ordinary sense, yet, on the other hand, not according to any precise scientific definition, but each with reference to the context of the place where it is found.

(3.) And again, it is this popular and unsystematic character of the Sacred Writings that makes it the more unsafe to dwell on detached portions of them, instead of comparing each part of Scripture with the rest. Not merely incomplete knowledge, but actual error, will often be the result; because it will often happen (as might be expected in an unscientific discourse)

reckoned by him mysteries, not *so far forth as* they are hidden and unintelligible, but *so far forth as* they are *revealed* and *explained*.

For another use of mystery, to signify a symbolical representation, *See* Parkhurst.

that the author has in view, in some particular passage, not the full development of any truth, but the correction of some particular *mistake*,—the inculcation of some particular *caution*,—or the enforcement of some particular *portion* of a doctrine or precept; so that such a passage, contemplated by itself, would tend to partial, and consequently, erroneous views.

(4.) And as it is hence necessary to call in the aid of different parts of Scripture for the interpretation of each other, so, those which appear the most at *variance* with each other,—which if taken singly, and strictly interpreted, would contradict each other,—are, for that very reason, the most important to be brought together and contemplated in connexion. The seeming contradictions in Scripture are too numerous not to be the result of design; and doubtless *were* designed, not as mere difficulties to try our faith and patience, but as furnishing the most suitable mode of instruction that could have been devised, by mutually explaining, and modifying or limiting, or extending, one another's meaning. By this means we are furnished, in some degree, with a test of the truth

or falsity of our conclusions: as long as the appearance of mutual contradiction remains, we may be sure that we are wrong:—when we can fairly and without violence* *reconcile* passages of opposite tendencies, we may entertain a hope that we are right. Such must be the procedure of the candid inquirer after truth; and by which, through divine help, he may hope to attain it. Those whose object is to find arguments in support of a favourite hypothesis built on a partial view of Scripture, will often be no less successful in *their* object;—in finding texts that will serve to give plausibility to their own system, and to perplex an opponent. But that opponent will usually have exactly the same advantages on his side also; each party having apparently some portion of Scripture favourable to his scheme, and others which he can hardly reconcile with it: and both parties perhaps being equally remote from the truth, and guilty of the very same error as to their mode of interpreting Scripture.

§ 4. That the apparent contradictions of

* See Pascal's Thoughts, XIII. 12.

Scripture *are* numerous,—that the instruction conveyed by them, if they be indeed designed for such a purpose, is furnished in abundance,—is too notorious to need being much insisted on.

We are told that God “repented of having made man upon the earth,”—that He “repented of having made Saul King over Israel,”—that “He repenteth Him of the evil;” and again, that “He is not the son of man that He should repent;” and that “in Him is no variableness nor shadow of turning.” We are told that “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;” yet again, by the very same author, that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” We read in one apostolical epistle, that Abraham was justified by faith, and in another, that he was justified by works. One discourse of our Lord’s, in which he makes mention of the day of judgment, and describes the blessing and the curse respectively pronounced on those who have performed or neglected such charitable offices as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and ministering to the sick, might seem to favour the conclusion that our final doom is to depend exclusively on our care or neglect of our distressed

brethren, without any regard to our faith, or to the purity or the integrity of our lives; in his final charge to his disciples again, it might seem that every thing is made to depend on right belief alone; “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” We are told again by our Lord, to pray and to give alms, secretly; and again, to let our “light so shine before men that they may see our good works;” and by the Apostle, “not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together” for the purpose of worship. We are told by our Lord, “He that is not with me is against me;” and again, “he that is not against us is with us;”—that “he who hateth not his father and mother, and wife and children, and all that he hath, cannot be his disciple;” and again by his Apostle, that “he who provideth not for his own house, is worse than an infidel.” The same again who tells his disciples, “the Father hath sent me;” “I go to the Father;” “the Father is greater than I;” “I can of mine own self do nothing;” tells them also, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father,—I am in the Father, and the Father in me,—I and the Father are one.” The same who tells them, that He “will

not leave them comfortless, but will come unto them;" and "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," tells them also, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you;" yet again He tells them of "the Comforter whom the Father will send in his (Christ's) name;" and again in another place, "if any man keep my saying, my Father will love him, and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And He who was preached to Cornelius as "one whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power," is spoken of by Paul, as "over all, God blessed for ever," "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily:"—and instances of a similar character might be multiplied to a great extent.

I am well aware what copious and satisfactory explanations have been given of a multitude of such seeming discrepancies as these: the only point that pertains to the present question, and which we ought, I think, strongly to dwell upon, is, that they are not to be regarded merely in the light of *difficulties*, but rather as belonging to the mode of *instruction* employed in Scripture.

In teaching moral duties, there are good reasons for introducing, as we find is occasionally done, some maxims which, taken separately, and interpreted with literal strictness, are at variance with each other, but which, when taken in connexion, serve to explain and modify each other. Instructions thus conveyed are evidently more striking and more likely to arouse the attention; and also, from the very circumstance that they call for careful reflection, more likely to make a lasting impression.^f But there are additional reasons for adopting this mode of conveying to us the requisite knowledge concerning mysteries which are not directly comprehensible by our understanding. Since no language could convey to man, with his present faculties, in *proper terms*, a clear and just notion of those attributes and acts of the Supreme Being, which revelation designed to impart, it was necessary for this purpose to resort to *analogical* expressions, which may convey to us, in faint shadows and figures, such a knowledge of divine mysteries as is requisite, and is alone within the reach of our capacity.^g

^f See the following Essay.

^g See King's Discourse on Predestination.

Now the disadvantage attending the use of such language is, that men are sometimes apt to understand it too literally, and to interpret what is said more strictly than was intended. And the best remedy against this mistake, is to *vary* the figures employed as much as possible;—to illustrate the same thing by *several different* analogies; by which means, these several expressions, being inconsistent when understood literally, will serve to limit and correct each other; and thus, together, to convey more clearly the real meaning designed.^h

What has been just said, may be illustrated by the language we employ in speaking of the human mind and its operations; respecting which, we have few or no terms which are not originally, at least, borrowed from the material world. For instance, it is very common to speak of the Memory as a kind of storehouse or repository:—we speak of *treasuring* up things in the memory; of having the memory well *stored*; and the like. Now there might be a danger that by the long and familiar use of such figurative expressions,

^h See Stewart's Philosophy.

we should at length come to forget that they *are* figurative;—to imagine the brain to be literally a kind of storehouse, and ideas or notions to be some real things actually laid up within it: but this mistake is guarded against by another, and quite different, set of figurative expressions for describing the same thing; for we often again speak of the Memory as a kind of *writing-tablet*; we speak of things being *written*,—*imprinted*,—*engraved*, on the memory; or again, of their being *erased* from the memory. Now these expressions again would mislead men, if understood literally; but this is prevented by those other modes of expression before mentioned; which in their turn are limited and explained by these. For by considering that the two, when taken literally, contradict each other,—that the memory cannot be, literally, at once a storehouse and a writing-tablet,—we are habitually reminded that it is literally neither; but is so called, only by analogy.¹

Now as we are thus unable to speak even of the workings of the human mind without using

¹ See “Elements of Logic.” Dissertation, chap. v. § 1, towards the end.

such figurative expressions, much less can we expect that all which is to be taught us of the things relating to the Most High, can be conveyed to us in any other way. And in each case it is requisite that the figures employed should be several and various, in order the better to guard us against understanding any one of them more literally than was intended. It was designed therefore that many of the expressions employed should be such as would, if strictly and literally interpreted, contradict each other; and such as may, when reconciled together, lead us as near the truth as our minds are capable of approaching. The mariner who has to steer his passage through the untracked ocean, when it happens that he cannot have the exact line of his course pointed out, is often enabled to avoid any important deviation from it, by being acquainted with certain boundaries on each side of it, and by keeping his vessel between them. Certain rocks and landmarks may serve to furnish to his eye a kind of line, which will secure him, as long as he keeps within them, from certain shoals or currents which he is to avoid on one side of his destined course: but this is of no service in guarding him

against the dangers which may beset him on the *opposite* quarter: for *this* purpose, another line must be pointed out to him, in the same manner, on the contrary side; and though neither of these lines is precisely that of the course he is to steer, yet an attention to both of them will enable him to proceed midway, in safety, and in the direction required. Even thus, it will often happen, that two apparently opposite passages of Scripture may together enable us to direct our faith or our practice aright; one shall be calculated to guard us against certain errors on one side, and the other, on the other side; neither, taken alone, shall convey the exact and entire truth; but both, taken in conjunction, may enable us sufficiently to ascertain it. Perplexity, therefore, and error must be the result of an undue preference, and an overstrict interpretation, of one or two such expressions, to the neglect of the others. For we have in many instances (to use another illustration) something corresponding to the composition of forces in mechanics: several different texts will be analogous to several impulses in various directions acting on a body which is to be set in motion, and whose combined

effect will propel it in the direction required; though no one of the impulses, taken singly, is acting precisely in that direction.

§ 5. After all, indeed, the notions conveyed to us in this way can be but very faint and indistinct; but for that very reason they are the less likely to be incorrect; for if we obtain a *full and clear* notion of things beyond the reach of the human faculties, it cannot fail to be an *erroneous* notion. The main object of revelation being to represent to us, not so much what God is in Himself, as what He is relatively to us, with a view to our practical benefit, this object may be sufficiently accomplished by dim and faint pictures of things which could not otherwise be revealed at all. The "light which no man can approach unto," if presented in unmitigated blaze to eyes too weak to endure it, would blind instead of enlightening; we now "see through a darkened glass," what we could not otherwise see at all.

Although, however, we may well *believe* that we are deficient in faculties for comprehending, as they are in themselves, many things of which

the Scriptures furnish us with some faint representations, yet since, of course, no one can form a distinct conception of the nature and extent of his *own* deficiency, it may be profitable to illustrate our own case by that of a person destitute of some faculty which we do possess; by which means we may the better understand the nature of that mode of instruction which the Scriptures adopt, and the advantage and necessity of employing it for such Beings as we now are. Let any one, for instance, attend to the case of a man born blind, and endeavour to convey to him some idea of the sense of seeing, and of the nature of light, and colours: when you attempt this, you will then be in a situation answering in some degree to that of the Inspired Writers when they are instructing us in the unseen things of God.—You might easily explain to the blind man that colours are perceived by the eyes; which convey to men (as well as the other senses, and even better) a knowledge of the objects around us; you might also easily make him understand that light is something different from heat, and yet proceeds from the sun,—a fire,—a candle,—or the like; and that

when nothing of this kind is present, there is darkness, in which no one can see ; and also that light is cheerful and agreeable, and darkness something melancholy : so far, we are giving merely *general* descriptions ; which would be intelligible enough, but could convey only the most faint and imperfect idea of Seeing. You might then impart some further knowledge by means of the *analogy* of the other senses ; for instance, you might teach him that Seeing, in one respect, resembles Hearing and Smelling, inasmuch as it conveys a knowledge of things at a distance, as they do ; but that, nevertheless, it is as different from either of them as they are from each other ; and that, moreover, Seeing gives us, what Hearing and Smelling cannot, a notion of the magnitude and of the form of bodies ; in which respect, it agrees with the sense of Touch ; though this last again conveys the knowledge only of such bodies as are close to us ; whereas Sight extends to a distance. Now such instruction as this, given to a blind man, may serve to illustrate what has been just said about the apparent contradictions in Scripture ; for the blind man might easily interpret the two

parts of this lesson as contradictory; and might say, "How can the same thing bear any resemblance to Hearing, and at the same time to Feeling?" Or he might regard even each part of the lesson as in itself contradictory and impossible;—saying, "You would fain persuade me that there is some way of touching things at a distance; or that there is a kind of Hearing or of Smelling by which one can judge of form and magnitude; neither of which is conceivable:" and it is plain, that if he regarded *either* part of your instruction, *by itself*, and was not careful to limit and explain it by the other, he would be utterly misled; for he would suppose Seeing to be much more like some one of the other senses than it really is. But if he were careful to attend to the whole, together, and to consider that two things may be very much alike in one respect, and yet very different in others,^k and that the same thing may be compared to several others which are themselves quite unlike, and may resemble one of these things in one respect, and another, in another, and in some respects again may

^k See King's Discourse on Predestination.

differ from all of them, he would acquire, a faint, indeed, and indistinct notion of Sight, but as far as it went, not an incorrect one: for he would understand that Sight in one respect corresponds, or is analogous, to Smelling and Hearing, inasmuch as it extends to distant objects; and again, in another respect, to Touch, inasmuch as it gives an idea of shape and size; that it differs from each of these respectively in the circumstance wherein it agrees with the other; and that it differs in many points from both. So that by interpreting each of these analogies in such a manner as to be reconcileable with the other, he would be using the best means to avoid misunderstanding either, and to attain the most perfect knowledge which his natural deficiency would allow. For if you attempted, beyond this, to give him any *distinct* and *precise* knowledge of the nature of light and colours, you would be more likely to confuse and mislead, than to instruct him.

The circumstance that the knowledge conveyed to us in Scripture, in many cases, is not merely incomplete in *degree*, but, being conveyed to us by Figures, is also *different in kind* from that

more direct and perfect knowledge which we may hope hereafter to attain, is alluded to, perhaps, in that expression of St. Paul's respecting the glorified state; "whether there be knowledge it shall *vanish* away:" we might have expected him, perhaps, to promise rather an *increase* and extension of our knowledge; but it appeared to him probably that the knowledge we now possess concerning several points not fully comprehensible to us, is so utterly different in kind, from that which is reserved for us, that the change might more properly be called an entire vanishing of the notions we are at present able to form, and a substitution of others in their place. In like manner, if we suppose a blind man who had been instructed in the way just described, to obtain Sight, all those faint analogical notions of Seeing, which we may conceive him to have formed, would fade away from his mind, and be succeeded by others incomparably more direct and clear.¹

¹ See the interesting and valuable account of a boy born blind and couched by Mr. Chesselden, extracted from the Philosophical Transactions, by Mr. H. Mayo, in his Physiology, p. 163.

Meanwhile our care must be, during our state of trial here below, not to imagine our knowledge more complete than it is; nor to expect from the Scriptures such information as they were not meant to supply. We must not study them as designed to convey, as it were, in terms of art, the speculative truths of philosophy; but must seek, in the first instance at least, and with the greatest diligence, such truths as are relative to man, and practical;—not the “Secret things which belong unto the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed, which belong unto us, that we may do them:” nor must we allow ourselves, in any case, to interpret strongly all the texts which seem to offer themselves on one side, while we explain away all that are on the other side; as if, on the ground that they are not to be taken literally, we were thence authorised to affix to them *any* signification whatever that may chance to suit our views; but we must endeavour honestly to reconcile Scripture with itself, and thus to avail ourselves of that mode of instruction which our Divine Teacher has thought best for us. So shall we be enabled, through divine help, to avoid, or to diminish, many of the

difficulties which presumptuous speculators, or partial and prejudiced inquirers, have to encounter in the Scriptures: we shall find them “able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

ESSAY VIII.

ON THE MODE OF CONVEYING MORAL PRECEPTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.



IN the preceding Essay some remarks were offered relative to the methods employed for communicating as much as was needful to be known, concerning the more abstruse doctrines of our religion; viz. by apparent *contradictions*;—by expressions which, if taken literally, would be at variance with each other; and which consequently must be mutually explained and modified by each other, in order that they may be reconciled. And in this case the advantage of such a procedure is evident; the things themselves are such as we are no more capable of distinctly and fully comprehending, than a blind man can, the nature of light and colours; such instruction, therefore, as we *can* receive concerning

them, must be necessarily imparted, according to the same principles by which we should convey to the blind some idea of Sight; viz. by employing several *different* analogies, each of which may serve to correct the others, and all of which in conjunction may convey a notion as nearly approaching to the reality as the case will permit.

But (as was observed in that Essay) in the inculcation of moral precepts, there cannot be the same reason for employing this method, as there is in doctrinal instruction respecting inscrutable mysteries. And yet there are not a few directly practical passages, in different parts of the New Testament, which, if taken literally and in their full force, would contradict each other; and such apparent discrepancies there are, not only between the writings of the Evangelists and the Apostolic Epistles, but also between different portions of our Lord's own discourses. Not only is Paul's censure of that man as "worse than an infidel," who neglects to "provide for those of his own household," at variance with our Lord's declaration, "If any man hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple," if both be

understood literally, and without limitation; but also, according to such an interpretation, our Lord's own precept to his disciples to "let their light shine before men," would be no less opposed to his command that their prayers and alms should be strictly concealed. And his description again of the day of judgment, in which the performance or neglect of the works of charity seem to be the sole ground of distinction between the saved and the condemned, is apparently opposed not only to the Apostle's declaration "by grace ye are saved, through faith, and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," and to numberless others of the same character, but also to the literal import of Christ's own parting declaration to his disciples, which seems to make the absence or presence of a right belief, the only point considered; "he that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved." And many other like instances might be adduced, which plainly show that the system of instructing by apparent contradictions is not confined to doctrinal, but extends to practical points; and that in both cases it is requisite to compare and balance, as it were, against each other, different parts of Scripture,

if we would gain a correct view of what it is intended to convey.^a

§ 1. For what purpose, then, it may be asked, did our Lord and his inspired followers resort to this method of instruction, in respect of those practical duties which are not, like the more abstruse points of faith, beyond the reach of man's faculties?

In order to answer this question, it will be

^a As I have treated of subjects nearly allied to the one now before us, in the third and fifth Essays of the first Series, it may be worth while briefly to notice in this place, the connexion, and also the distinction, between those and the present Essay. I was speaking, in them, of a *peculiarly* (considering Christianity as compared with any human system) in the *motives* employed by the sacred writers for producing moral conduct, and also, in the *examples* (of Jesus Himself, Essay III. and of children, Essay V.) which they propose for our imitation and self-instruction. At present, I am considering their *mode* of conveying to us the *precepts* of morality. In all, it is the moral-instruction of Scripture that I have been treating of; but, distinctly, of the different parts of which it (and indeed all complete moral-instruction) consists; namely, 1st, the Motives inculcated; 2dly, the Examples proposed; 3dly, the Precepts delivered.

necessary to revert to some considerations which have been formerly suggested.^b

Let it be observed, then, that it was no part of the scheme of the gospel-revelation to lay down any thing approaching to a complete system of moral precepts,—to enumerate every thing that is enjoined or forbidden by our religion; nor again to give a detailed general description of Christian duty,—or to delineate, after the manner of systematic ethical writers, each separate habit of virtue or of vice. When the Mosaic law was brought to a close,—(a law, of which we have no Scripture warrant for supposing that any part was intended to continue in force, under the gospel-dispensation, or to be extended to the Gentiles); when this law, I say, was brought to a close, no *other* set of precise rules was substituted in its place. New and higher motives were implanted;—a more exalted and perfect example was proposed for imitation;—a loftier standard of morality was established,—rewards more glorious, and punishments more appalling, were held out;—and supernatural aid

^a Essay V.

was bestowed; and the Christian, with these incentives and these advantages, is left to apply, for himself, in each case, the principles of the Gospel; he is left to act at his own discretion, according to the dictates of his conscience,—to cultivate Christian dispositions,—and thus to be “a law unto himself.” From the exact regulations under which the Israelites, when in a condition analogous to childhood, were placed, he is released; not that he may be under a less strict moral restraint, but that he may attain, under it, a more manly self-government,—a higher degree of moral excellence; even as the precise rules and strict control under which a child is placed, are gradually relaxed as he advances towards maturity; not on the ground that good conduct is less required of a man than of a child, but, on the contrary, because the very maturity of age, which emancipates him from the trammels of childhood, renders him capable of regulating his conduct for himself by his own judgment. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord,” (according to the prophet Jeremiah, cited in the Epistle to the Hebrews,) “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel;

not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers for this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."

The system, then, according to which the Christian's life is to be regulated, is one under which, not a less, but a greater degree of moral perfection is expected of him ; but which substitutes sublime principles for exact rules ; it is this system that the Apostle sometimes calls "Faith," — sometimes "the Law of Faith," to distinguish it, not from good works, but from the law of Moses. It is called the Law of Faith, not because Christians are not (which he assures us they are) to stand before Christ's tribunal "to give an account of the things done in the body," but because their moral conduct is required to spring from faith ;—from faith in the ?
 ?— redeeming mercy of God, "who was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," and the devout gratitude which is the natural result of this ; from faith in the divine holiness and purity of the Saviour, and the consequent desire to tread

in *his* steps whose life is our example:—from that faith in his promised rewards which leads to the endeavour after such a preparation of ourselves as may qualify us to dwell “for ever with the Lord;”—from faith in his promised presence with us, even unto the end of the world, by his Spirit “which worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.^c

Such a system then, it was necessary so to develop, that its true character might not be mistaken. Since Christians were *not* to be guided by a precise code of laws, it was necessary to guard them carefully against *expecting* one. And even during our Lord’s own ministry, before the “Law of faith was perfectly laid down, (the objects of that faith being but faintly and partially revealed,) still it was needful, even at the very outset, that men should not be led, or left, to suppose, that either a collection of exact rules, or a system of moral philosophy, was about to be proposed to their acceptance;—that either the Mosaic law was to remain in force, as to the literal observance of its several precepts, extended by the addition of others,—or that any

^c Essay III. first Series.

corresponding system—any fresh enumeration of specific acts forbidden and enjoined,—was to be introduced in the room of it. And care was the more necessary on this point, both because man in general is more ready to receive, even a burdensome law, of this character, than to be left to his own watchful and responsible discretion in acting up to certain principles, and also because the Jews in particular had been *accustomed* to precise regulations, and nice distinctions as to specific acts, even far beyond what the written law of Moses had laid down.

And yet our Lord's hearers had need of *some* moral instruction. It was important that *illustrations* should be afforded them of the *application* of the general principles of the new religion, to each particular point;—it was desirable to enforce such duties as were especially neglected, and to point out the comparative degrees of importance of such as had been unduly estimated;—many prevailing faults and prejudices called for correction;—and it was needful, universally, to guard against the supposition that the new covenant was designed to substitute faith for virtuous practice, and to save those who should “call

Jesus Lord," while they continued "workers of iniquity." And as all this was to be accomplished in the course of a short ministry, and the instruction was to be conveyed to men for the most part of untutored and unreflective minds, it was the more important that the mode of conveying it should be as striking and permanently impressive as possible; with a constant caution at the same time against the mistake into which the hearers were ever liable to fall;—that of imagining that they were to receive certain definite precepts, and *satisfying* themselves with a literal obedience to each.

Something peculiar then may be expected in the mode of conveying moral instructions, when the object proposed comprehended all the circumstances just mentioned;—when it required that, besides being suited to the capacity and to the moral condition of the hearer, the precepts should at the same time be both forcibly impressive, and also such as to exclude the idea of any intention to lay down a complete moral code.

§ 2. In the moral lessons of the Gospel, accordingly, three peculiarities especially may be

observed, which have a reference to the circumstances I have noticed, and which may be explained by them.

First, The precepts are often apparently *contradictory* to each other:

Secondly, They are often such that a literal compliance with them would be, in many cases, either *impossible*, or at least, *extravagant* and *irrational*:

And, *Thirdly*, This literal compliance would in many instances amount to so *insignificant* and *unimportant* a point of duty, as could not be supposed deserving of a distinct inculcation for its own sake. And two, or all three, of these characters may sometimes be found to meet in one single precept.

The reason of all this is clear, from the principles that have been already laid down: every mode is employed of warning the hearers against satisfying themselves with an observance of these precepts according to the letter, in doing or abstaining from some particular action. For a literal compliance with precepts which, literally taken, are *inconsistent*, would be *impossible*; where that literal compliance would be *wrong* or

absurd, it is manifest it could not be *intended*; where it would be *trifling*, it is manifest that it cannot be *all* that is intended. And thus the disciples were driven, if they were sincerely desirous to learn, and would interpret rationally and candidly what they heard, to perceive that such precepts as I am speaking of were designed to explain and to enforce those general principles on which men are to regulate their conduct: while the very circumstance that such instructions excite some degree of surprise, and evidently call for careful reflection, renders them the more likely to make a lasting impression. Many instances of each description will readily occur to most persons: I will advert to a very few.

When Jesus tells his disciples to pray and to give alms in secret, and not to let their "left hand know what their right hand doeth," and yet exhorts them to "let their light shine before men," it is plain from these precepts, taken in conjunction, and explained by each other, that his design was to discountenance an ostentatious *motive*, but to leave to our own conscientious discretion the mode of performing each action on each occasion. When the publicity of our alms

and of our devotions, appears likely to “glorify God,” and to benefit men by the influence of a good example, the principles of the Gospel prescribe that publicity; in cases where it tends only to the gratification of our own vanity, and especially when we have reason to fear that we may be too much actuated by the desire of men’s praise, then, concealment is to be preferred.

Again, when men’s future destiny is described in one place as determined by their performance or omission of the social duties,—in another, by the government of the tongue,—in another, by belief and baptism alone,—in another, (the parable of the rich man and Lazarus) apparently by the luxuries enjoyed, or privations undergone in the present life,—we may easily learn, by comparing and balancing together all these passages, that no good works of man, not springing from belief in the Gospel, can tend to salvation,—yet that professions of faith in Christ are but a mockery of Him, when unaccompanied with active benevolence towards those whom He calls his brethren;—that we shall be condemned or justified by our *words* as *well as* by our actions;—and that those who

set their hearts on the good things of this world, and lay up no treasures in heaven, can have no reasonable expectation of heavenly rewards.

Again, the injunction in the passage before cited, to "hate father and mother," &c. if we would be Christ's disciples,^d is not only, if taken

^d It may be observed by the way, what an *evidence* to the truth of Christianity is afforded by this declaration of our Lord, together with his warning that every one who would be his disciple must be ready to "take up his cross and follow Him," and must, in imitation of a man designing to build, and of a king about to make war, coolly calculate before-hand whether he has resources and resolution sufficient to go through with the enterprise. All this constitutes so uninviting a doctrine, that we may be sure no one would have preached it who had any object in view except that of teaching the truth. We have here therefore one of those many internal evidences of our religion, which may be made completely intelligible to the unlearned Christian. For common sense may convince any one, that had Jesus been either an impostor or an enthusiast, he would never have entertained, and taught others to entertain, such a view of his religion. He would have used all means to invite men to become his disciples, instead of deterring them; and would either himself have overlooked, or else concealed from the people, the difficulties to be encountered by those who should embrace the Gospel; instead of pointing them out, and earnestly dwelling upon them.

literally, at variance with the exhortations to universal benevolence, and to Paul's command to provide for our families, but also to the plainest dictates of conscience and of common sense. This then is an instance which illustrates at once two of the principles above laid down. It is plain, therefore, that such a precept could not be meant to be understood and obeyed literally: and if there could be any doubt in what manner Christ intended it should be obeyed, He himself has given us in another place an explanation of it; "he that loveth father or mother *more* than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." It is evident, therefore, that what is intended by the command to hate the objects of our strongest regard, is, that the things of the greatest importance to our happiness, and which have the strongest hold on our affections, must be accounted by us as nothing, in comparison with our devotedness to Christ; and that whenever any of these objects shall chance to stand in the way of our obedience to Him, we must be ready to resign it without a murmur.

Sacrifices of this kind were doubtless much

more frequently called for in the first ages of the Church, than they are now: because not only many were called on to abandon their homes and friends, and devote themselves to the propagation of the Gospel in distant countries, but it also frequently happened that men's nearest and dearest connexions were at variance with them respecting the religion of Christ; and that they had to suffer persecution, or at least censure and contempt, from those very friends whose good opinion and regard they had been the most accustomed to prize: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I tell you nay, but rather division: the father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

It is plain, therefore, that a man must have been (in such circumstances) very strongly tempted to shrink from the bold and open profession of his faith; and to concede too much to the authority of those around him: and, accordingly, we read of many leading men among the Jews, who sought to compromise the matter, by outwardly renouncing the opinions they inwardly held,—who "believed in Jesus, but secretly," for fear of being

“cast out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

There is not, however, nor will ever be, any time or any country, in which the sincere Christian is not liable to be called upon to make some sacrifices in the cause of Christ,—to do, or to forego, or undergo, something, which occasions a painful struggle to his nature; and this our Lord exhorts us deliberately to prepare for, and if we would be his disciples, to give Him a most decided and strong preference to every object that may stand in the way of our faith or of our obedience to Him. This, He in another place very strongly enforces in a figurative form of expression; which also, common sense teaches us, it would be absurd to understand literally; saying, “if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee;” meaning thereby, that whatever *offends* us as Christians, that is, stands in our way, and obstructs our progress in following our Master’s steps, though it may be as dear to us as an eye, or a right hand, must be renounced thoroughly, and heartily, and cheerfully, for his sake, if we expect that He should own us as his disciples.

Now this precept of plucking out an eye, or cutting off a right hand, is by no means hard to be understood, as to the spirit and intention of it, and the disposition meant to be recommended; and when it *is* understood, its effect will be, on those who sincerely study to comply with it, exactly what our Lord designed; they *cannot* in this case satisfy their conscience by a literal compliance with it in the performance of any specific act; and, consequently, will the more naturally be led to cultivate that frame of mind, and study to adopt that principle of thorough devotedness to Christ, which He meant to recommend.

Again, in inculcating the duty of gentleness and patience under provocation, He says, "if any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also; if any man will take away thy cloak, let him have thy coat also; if any man compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain:" in which it is evident, that his meaning was, not the mere literal performance of those specific actions mentioned, but the cultivation of a mild and long-suffering temper. The strong way in which He delivered those precepts—the striking and often paradoxical illustrations which He gave

of them—had the effect of making a more lively impression on the hearers' minds, and at the same time guarded them (as I have just before observed) against supposing that it was enough to perform, literally, the particular actions mentioned, without adopting the principle of action which He was illustrating. This last instance again combines two of the circumstances above mentioned: the mere literal observance of the precept would not only be in many cases irrational, but also manifestly insufficient, and would fall far short of what is meant to be inculcated; and hence a candid hearer is the more immediately led to understand, that obedience to it implies not the bare performance of this or that particular action, but the careful cultivation of a certain *habit* of action.

The same observations will apply to our Lord's precept against chusing "the most honourable seats at feasts;" and his exhortation to men to occupy a lower place than they have a just title to. He did indeed intend that his rule respecting good manners should be literally observed, since good manners is a part of good morals; but it is evident that this literal

compliance was the *least part* of what He designed, and that He took this method of inculcating, generally, a caution against arrogance and self-exaltation.

Universally indeed, He was accustomed to illustrate whatever principle He had in view, by some particular instance; knowing that this would take better hold on men's attention, and be more surely fixed in their memory, than if He had confined himself to the mere general maxim; and that it would be very easy for any one, after being, by this exemplification, put in possession of the general maxim, to extend and apply it, for himself, to every case that might occur; supposing him to have the sincere disposition to do so, without which no instruction can avail.

Thus, when He was called upon to explain what kind of neighbourly love we ought to show, and towards whom, He illustrates his meaning by relating the parable of a man who "fell among thieves," and He concludes his instruction by saying, "Go and do thou likewise;" which exhortation no one can be so stupid, if he be not also perverse, as to interpret by the letter, as

meaning merely that when he might chance to meet with a traveller thus circumstanced, he should relieve him, and that precisely such a case as that in the parable was all that was contemplated. The interpretation of "Go and do thou likewise" was clear enough to any one who wished to understand it; as signifying that we are to regard every one as a neighbour to whom we have an opportunity of doing service, and are to be ready to perform the kind offices of a neighbour towards him.

But, as I have said, our Lord chose not only to illustrate his general maxim by some particular exemplification; but, also, in order to make it the more clear to his hearers that this *was* his object,—that the instances adduced *were* for the purpose of illustrating the general rule,—it happened very frequently, as in the case of some of the illustrations just mentioned, that He selected by choice such as were in themselves the smallest and most *insignificant* instances of the rule. Thus, when He wished to impress on his disciples in the most forcible manner the duty of being ready to serve, and perform kind offices for one another, He taught them by an *action*,—by Himself

condescending to wash their feet; and afterwards telling them, “ye ought also to wash one another’s feet.” This, it is well known, was, from the peculiar circumstances of the age and country, one of the chief refreshments to travellers: this particular instance, consequently, was chosen as affording an easy and familiar illustration of the general disposition He designed to inculcate; a readiness to perform all manner of kind offices for one another. Now if the particular office of kindness, selected by Him, had been one of the more *important* services of life, there might have been the more danger of their supposing that his precept was meant to extend only *to that particular* service mentioned: whereas this was guarded against by his particularizing one of the *smallest*: when He said to them, “ye ought to wash one another’s feet,” they could not have a doubt that the precept was meant to extend to more than that one point of hospitality, and to comprehend a *general* disposition to befriend one another.

§ 3. To those, then, who are sincerely desirous of instruction, and willing to use care and dili-

gence in seeking it, and in practically applying what they learn, it will, in most cases, be no difficult task, to ascertain what principles those are which our Lord and his Apostles intended, on each occasion, to inculcate, and in what manner Christians are required to exemplify them in their lives.

If we, first, examine the *whole* of each passage, so as to understand the occasion on which any precept was delivered, and to what persons, and under what circumstances; and if we are also careful to compare different (and especially, apparently inconsistent) passages together, so interpreting each as it is explained, or limited, or confirmed, or extended, or otherwise modified, by the rest; we shall be employing those means for ascertaining aright the sense of God's word, which common prudence would prescribe,—which doubtless were intended to be employed in such an enquiry,—and which, we may trust, by God's grace will not be employed in vain.

On the other hand, the inattentive and the uncandid,—those who read the Scriptures without diligent study, or with a study only to find confirmations of their preconceived notions, and

vindications of their own conduct,—such, could not have been secured from error, even by any other mode of instruction that could have been adopted. Let it not be objected, therefore, to the method pursued by our Lord and his followers, that it affords an opening, for such as are so disposed, to escape from any doctrines or duties they may object to, and to model others according to their own inclinations, by dwelling on and enforcing literally, such texts as suit their purpose, and explaining away the rest. The most precise and detailed precepts would have been no less successfully evaded by the same persons; they would easily have found some contrivance, when they were so disposed, to “make the word of God of none effect, by their tradition.” And the most copious and philosophical system of ethics would have proved no better safeguard against the devices of a corrupt heart. Moral treatises afford no substitute for the exercise of discretion and of candour; philosophy cannot teach its own application: on the contrary, such studies are useful to those only who *employ* that good sense and sincerity of intention, in bringing them into practice in the details of life. It is

not enough (as the most illustrious of the ancient moralists has observed^e) to lay down, that, in each department of conduct, virtue consists in the medium between an excess and a deficiency; it still remains to be decided in each single instance, where this medium is to be placed; and as the determination of this is necessarily left to the judgment and conscience of the individual, so, any one whose moral judgment is not uncorrupt, and who is seeking, not to improve his character, but to vindicate it, may easily find means first to represent, and afterwards to believe, his own conduct to be exactly the right medium. For the maxim laid down in another place by the philosopher just alluded to, for applying his own rules, is one which the generality of men completely reverse: he bids each man observe to which of the two extremes *he* is, in each point, most prone by his own natural disposition, and to regard *that*, as (relatively to him) the worse extreme of the two; being the one into which he is the more liable to fall: the common practice, on the contrary, is for each to regard, (as, indeed,

^e Arist. Eth. Nicom. Book VI. chap. i.

is very natural) *that*, as the worse extreme, to which he has the less tendency, and to look with less abhorrence on each fault in proportion as it is the more congenial to his own inclinations.

Without vigilant and candid self-examination, then, no system of moral instruction that could have been devised, would have been practically available: and *with* this, the instructions afforded in the Gospel will, through divine help, prove sufficient. There are two objects, neither of which a man will usually fail to attain, who zealously and steadily seeks it: the one is, the knowledge of what in each case he ought to do; the other is, a plausible excuse for doing as he is inclined. The latter of these, the carnally-minded might find in any set of precepts or moral instructions that could have been framed; the former, the spiritually-minded will not fail to obtain in the Gospel.

Only let him not seek in it for what he will not find there;—precise and minute directions for every case that can occur; or a set of insulated maxims which admit of being taken away, as it were, from the context, and interpreted and applied without any reference to the rest of

Scripture; or for a general detailed description of moral duties.

But he will find there the most pure and sublime motives inculcated,—the noblest principles instilled,—the most bold and uncompromising, yet sober and rational tone of morality maintained,—the most animating examples proposed, and above all, the most effectual guidance, and assistance, and defence provided; even that of the Spirit of Truth, who will enable us duly to profit by the teaching of his inspired Servants; that we “may have our fruit unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

ESSAY IX.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THOSE things which God's most favoured servants under the old dispensation—which “many prophets and kings had in vain desired to see and hear,”—the disciples of Jesus had been permitted to witness. They had seen the man whom “God had anointed with the Holy Ghost,”^a—and “given it unto him not by measure;”^b—“the image of the invisible God,”^c “whom no man hath seen at any time,”^d but whom “the only-begotten Son had declared unto them;”^e “being the express image of his Person.”^f Imperfect and indistinct indeed, perhaps we may say confused, must have been the notions they entertained respecting the

^a Acts x. 38.

^b John iii. 34.

^c Coloss. i. 15.

^d 1 John iv. 12; also John i. 18.

^e John i. 18.

^f Heb. i. 3.

mysterious Person with whom they had been so long holding intercourse. Such must be *our* notions also concerning Him, unless they be erroneous; for the ideas we form on a subject surpassing the powers of our present minds, and which Scripture has but indistinctly revealed, cannot be at once, *clear*, and *correct*. The disciples, however, had, during our Lord's abode with them, even more imperfect notions respecting Him than they were afterwards taught to form. He had "many things to say unto them, which yet they could not bear." But they "knew and were sure that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God," and that "He had the words of eternal life:" and they had latterly been further taught that they were not to regard Him as merely bearing the commission of the Most High, like the prophets of old; nor yet as merely some Being of a superhuman nature, whether a creature, or (according to the presumptuous fancies which afterwards prevailed) some *Æon*, or *Emanation* from the Deity, and partaking of the divine nature;⁵ for when asked by Philip, who probably

⁵ The Gnostics (*i. e.* men of "science, falsely so called,") taught the doctrine of successive emanations ("endless

was disposed to entertain some such notion, to show them the Father, He replied, "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how then sayest thou, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?"^h the words that

genealogies" alluded to by Paul) from the Deity (whom they called the "Fulness"), and from one another, of these celestial beings: in whom they *personified* many of the Scripture-terms relating to the character or the dispensations of the Most High. Such as *Logos* (the Word), of whom they regarded Christ as an incarnation; *Phós* (Light), feigned to have been incarnate in John the Baptist; *Aletheia* (Truth); *Zoe* (Life); *Monogenes* (only-begotten), and others. Without some acquaintance with this tissue of impious absurdity, it is impossible to understand fully the opening of John's Gospel. See "Hinds's History of the Rise and Early Progress of Christianity," Vol. II. p. 49.

Paul's expression also, "in Him dwelleth all the *Fulness* of the Godhead bodily" "it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all Fulness dwell," have reference probably to the same heresy.

^h This mode of expression seems to have been employed, as it constantly is, by our Lord, to guard his hearers against the notion of a *local* Deity, — against literally attributing *place* to the Divine mind: thus, he says, "abide in me, and *I in you*:" and "the same dwelleth in me, and *I in him*," &c.

I speak unto you I speak not of myself ; but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me ; or else believe me for the very works' sake." (John xiv.)

§ 1. Well therefore might the disciples, when thus far taught, anticipate with grief and dismay the approaching loss of this their Divine Master—the destruction of “the temple of his body,” and the withdrawing of this “manifestation of God in the flesh,” with which they had been so long favoured ; and He most tenderly sets himself to relieve their fears and sorrows, by assuring them of his speedy return to abide with them for ever ; “I go away, and come again unto you ; a little while, and ye shall not see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me.” It was not, indeed, the bodily presence of their Master in the flesh, that they were to look for as continuing with them “always, even unto the end of the world,” as these and several other of his expressions would have led them to suppose, had there not been others to modify and explain them ; it was *another* comforter,—the Holy Spirit, whom the Father should

send in Christ's name, that should teach them all things, and should "abide with" them "for ever;" though still Jesus suffers them not to suppose that they were to transfer their love and allegiance to a new master, or to look for consolation and instruction to any distinct Being from Himself; though after his ascension He would no longer be, as heretofore, the object daily present to their senses; "That Spirit of Truth," He said, they knew; "for he dwelleth *with* you, and shall be *in* you:" "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you; yet a little while and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also: at that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you"¹ "he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" "my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him:" "abide in me, and I in you:¹ as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me;—without me ye can do nothing." (John xv.)

¹ See note (h) p. 278.

That these promises and these precepts of Jesus were not so confined to the disciples then around him as to concern no other Christians, is most evident. If the Apostles could bring forth no fruit except they “abode in Him, and He in them,” no more, surely, can we. He had expressly declared that He “prayed not for them alone, but for those also, who should believe on Him through their word;” nor would his promise of being “with them always even unto the end of the world,” have been fulfilled, by any assistance bestowed exclusively on one generation of mortal men.

And it is equally clear, I think, to any one who seeks in earnest to be led by the Scriptures, that our Saviour’s words are not to be explained as relating merely to a system of doctrines and motives,—to an *abstract religious principle*,—but to a real, individual, *personal* agent, even the Holy Spirit operating on the minds of believers; which is called, amidst the diversity of operations, one and the *same Spirit*, not, figuratively, as when we speak of the spirit of patriotism,—the spirit of emulation,—the spirit of philosophical inquiry, and the like; but literally and numerically, one

Being, even the one God, whose Temple is the whole body of the faithful; which Temple they are warned not to defile, lest God destroy them. For if any one could even so strain this last expression (as well as many other such) of the Apostle Paul, and likewise all the words of Christ Himself, as to interpret them into mere metaphor, it would still be impossible for him to conceive a mere principle of action,—a christian spirit, in that transferred sense of the word,—enabling Christians to work *sensible miracles*; and these we find distinctly attributed to the immediate agency of the Divine Spirit. One indeed of the many important uses of the miraculous gifts bestowed on the infant Church, and one, doubtless, of those for which they were designed, was this: they served to prove, among other things, that the promised indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in his Church, was not to be understood as a mere figure of speech, denoting their adherence to the doctrines He taught, and the possession of the inspired record of them, but a real, though unseen, presence, by his Spirit;—not the mere keeping of his commandments through love for his memory, but a

spiritual union with Him; at once the promised reward, and the bond and support of that obedient love,—the effect at once and cause of our “keeping his saying.” “For if any man love me,” said He, “he will keep my saying, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” And it is, I conceive, this, the more intimate union of the Spirit of Christ with his disciples—more intimate than that which had existed while He was present with them in the flesh,—that He teaches them to regard as a ground for not only not grieving, but rejoicing, at his departure, which was to lead to such a re-union; “if ye loved me ye would rejoice.”

§ 2. It may be said, however, that since “every good and every perfect gift is from above,”—since from God “proceed all holy desires, good counsels, and just works,” we must not account spiritual influence as any peculiar privilege of the gospel-system, but must acknowledge that good men among the Israelites of old, if not among the heathen also, acted under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Indeed we find them even

recognizing this influence by their prayers to God to “make a clean heart within them,” &c. And yet on the other hand, there can surely be no doubt that under the Gospel, some *new* manifestation of God in the Spirit *has* taken place. We cannot suppose that the persons, who by our Lord’s directions were baptized into^k the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,—who were “born again of water and of the Spirit,” in order to their entering into the newly-founded kingdom of heaven, were admitted to no privilege which had not been all along enjoyed by their fathers even from the creation. And every part of the New Testament confirms this view. Among the rest, we find in John’s Gospel, “this spake He of the Holy Ghost, which they that believed on Him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet;”¹ “because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” And again, those twelve disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus in his *third* apostolical journey, had “not so much as heard whether there be

^k Not “*in* the name,” as it is in our translation; which probably in this and a few more instances showed too much deference for the Vulgate Latin Version. That translates “*in nomine*,” a rendering plainly at variance with the original.

¹ “Given,” is added by the translators.

any Holy Ghost." Yet certainly they could not have been ignorant that God is a Spirit. Nor can it well be supposed, that they, and the Evangelist John in the passage just cited, refer to the *miraculous* effusion alone, and call *that extraordinary* agency, especially and exclusively, the Holy Ghost; since they must have known how frequently God had of old inspired the prophets, and enabled many of them to perform various miracles.

In what then are we to conclude the difference consisted between the Christian Church and her predecessor, in respect of spiritual endowment? Without presuming to decide on the *degree* of divine assistance bestowed on individuals under the two dispensations respectively, (which would be presumptuous,) this important distinction we may plainly perceive; that, of the Christian Church the Holy Spirit is the PROMISED and PERMANENT Comforter: He is the "*promise* of the Father," sent that "He may abide with us *for ever.*" Whatever sanctifying aid may have been, in fact, supplied, under the Old Covenant, it was no *part* of that *Covenant*;—of the Christian Covenant, it is. God the Holy Ghost,—God

manifest in the Spirit, was not the *permanent Ruler* of the former Church, as He is of the Christian. As for the divine communications to the prophets, and the *miraculous* powers bestowed on them and on others, under the Old Dispensation, these were not continuous, but *occasional*; inward *sanctifying grace*, again, bestowed on the humble and pious, may have been, for aught we know, constant, but was not *promised*. And hence the Jewish people was never called, like the Christians, the “Temple of the Holy Ghost.”

What the Apostle John therefore (as well as those disciples at Ephesus) meant by the Holy Spirit, which, he says, “was not yet,” (*οὐπω ἦν*) must have been, this *covenanted* and *perpetual* manifestation of God in the Spirit, (a manifestation now to faith only, though at first confirmed by sensible miracles) as the Governor, Protector, Consoler, in short, Paraclete, of the Christian Church. For we are Christ’s *Body*; and “hereby know we that He dwelleth in us, by his *Spirit* which He hath given us.” These considerations alone would be sufficient to prove, were other proofs less abundant, that the promised presence

of God with the Christian Church, cannot, without setting Scripture at defiance, be understood as referring merely to the *writings* of the New Testament which He inspired; since *that* would give us no advantage over the Jewish Church; for “holy men *of old* spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

§ 3. The promise of Christ, however, that He would always, even unto the end of the world, be with his Church, which is thus constituted “the temple of the Holy Ghost that dwelleth in it,” is not understood by all in the same extent. While on the one hand, some enthusiasts have pretended to inspiration, and other miraculous gifts; many on the other hand, who are far removed from this error, but who are satisfied with vague and careless notions, have a sort of general idea of spiritual aid not being wholly withdrawn from Christians, but bestowed in a much *less* degree than on the saints of the primitive times; without seeking to determine the *measure*, or the *kind* of spiritual assistance to be reasonably hoped for by each class respectively, or the *signs* by which each might recognize its presence.

And yet it might naturally be supposed, that inscrutable as the nature of God must be to his creatures, and little as they can understand of the reasons and the modes of his dealings with them, at least we should be capable of knowing *what* the spiritual aid is that we are taught to look for, and commanded to pray and to strive for. The humblest peasant, who subsists by the labour of his hands, may be left ignorant indeed of the process by which corn vegetates in the earth, or supplies nutriment to the human frame; but it is needful for his natural life that he should understand how to gain his daily bread, which he is taught to pray for, and to distinguish it from what is useless or noxious; and it is no less needful that the plainest Christian should be able to understand how his spiritual life is to be supported,—the welfare of his soul secured; and should be capable of guarding against any dangerous error on the subject.

It is desirable, therefore, that both the *resemblances* and the *differences* between our condition and that of the primitive Christians, in respect of this point, should be as accurately laid down as possible, and should be frequently dwelt upon;

since the worst consequences may result from either underrating or overrating the spiritual aid to be expected by Christians of the present day.

Thus much is generally admitted; that the promise of the Holy Spirit extended to both classes of Christians; but that the sensibly-miraculous gifts bestowed on the early Church have been long since withdrawn; and these are, usually, and very suitably, called the *extraordinary* gifts; as bestowed at a particular time, and for an especial purpose; and are thus distinguished from what are called the *ordinary* operations of the Spirit, as needful alike for all Christians, and at all times. A more particular consideration, however, of some of the several points of resemblance, and of difference, between the two cases, is requisite for the purpose of guarding against some prevailing errors, and of calling attention to doctrines not always sufficiently noticed, or adequately developed.

And this inquiry falls naturally under two heads, (which however cannot be kept entirely distinct); *viz.* 1st, as to the different *classes of gifts themselves*; and 2dly, as to the *tokens* by which the presence of each is to be known—the

way in which each kind of spiritual influence is to be recognized.

§ 4. First, then, the display of “signs and wonders” in the primitive Church, constitutes one great distinction between their case and ours:^m but this distinction being acknowledged, we should consider attentively on whom, and for what purposes, these miraculous gifts were bestowed; for it is not unnatural, nor I believe uncommon to regard the persons who were thus gifted, as holier, and more highly favoured of God, than Christians of the present day;—as *Saints*, in some different sense or degree from any thing that we are required or allowed to become. But an examination of the case will plainly show, that we have no reasons for regarding the Christians thus gifted as having any such advantage over us. It is not necessary to enumerate and discuss the several kinds of extraordinary gifts; it is plain that they were not such as can be supposed

^m For it is not necessary at present to enter into an examination of the false pretensions of the Romanists, and of some other impostors and enthusiasts who have professed to work sensible miracles.

to have been bestowed for the direct benefit of the possessor. The gift of tongues, for instance, or of prophecy, or of healing the sick, could not, of themselves, and immediately, conduce to the salvation of the persons thus gifted. But more than this, they did not even afford *proof* that such persons were completely acceptable to God, and in a safe state in respect of their salvation; for, strange as it may appear to us, there is no possibility of doubting that several of them not only incurred the Apostle's severe rebuke for their misconduct, but among the rest were censured for a vain and contentious display of these very miraculous endowments; they showed a carnal mind, not only while possessed of extraordinary spiritual gifts, but even in the very employment of those gifts.

It appears probable, indeed, that the Apostles (who alone had this power) conferred some extraordinary gift or other on *every one*, without exception, of the converts who came in their way, as a token and pledge of their being in truth a holy people to the Lord. At least no mention is made of their bestowing these gifts on some and not on others; and certainly, whether they made

any selection or not, they did not, as we plainly find, confine the gifts to such as it was foreseen would make a right use of them.

For what purpose then were these gifts bestowed? Principally, we may conclude, for these three: 1st, for the satisfactory conviction and assurance of the minds of the possessors; 2dly, for the propagation of the religion; and, 3dly, for the edification of the Church.

And, First, Some external sensible operations of the Spirit must have been highly important at least, to satisfy the minds of the first Christians of his actual presence among them. They had so far shaken off their Jewish and Heathen prejudices (prejudices which we of the present day can hardly bring ourselves adequately to estimate) as to receive the religion of Christ crucified, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" they had acknowledged that the Eternal God, the Author and Ruler of the Universe, had been manifested in the flesh, incarnate in an obscure, despised, and persecuted peasant, who had been executed as one of the vilest of criminals; and on being baptized into this faith they were further required to believe that

they were thus “born again of water and of the Holy Spirit,”—that He, the same all-present God, dwelt in an especial manner in the Church, of which they were become members, as in a most holy Temple, and was ever at hand to sanctify and guide them. “Know ye not,” says Paul, “that ye are the Temple of the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in you?” Now all this was so opposite to all their former notions,—so strange to all their habits of thought, that they might well need some special assurance of such a doctrine as this last;—some support against the uneasy doubts and suspicions which might suggest the question, “is the Lord among us, or not?” And such an assurance was graciously afforded them in the sensible testimony of his presence which God displayed, by conferring powers manifestly miraculous.^a Those, for instance, who received the gift of speaking in, or of interpreting, a language they had never learned, could not suspect that they had been deceived by a false teacher, or that they were under the delusion of a heated imagination: they would have ground

^a “Hinds’s History,” &c. Vol. I. p. 227.

for undoubting confidence, therefore, that they were indeed born of the Spirit, and living stones of that holy Temple, not made with hands, in which He resides. Not, however, be it observed, that they were to regard their extraordinary gifts as the only, or as the most important, *instance* of spiritual influence, but as the *proof* and pledge of it: the truly important benefit was, the sanctification by the Spirit, with a view to eternal life; the miraculous power was the seal and the earnest of that benefit,—the sign and notification, as it were, that the treasure had been bestowed,—not the treasure itself.

Secondly, These extraordinary gifts were needful in various ways for the propagation of Christ's religion; both to furnish those who preached it with credentials, as it were, from heaven, to prove the divine origin of the religion, and also to enable all nations to "hear in their own tongues the wonderful works of God."

Thirdly, Divers extraordinary gifts (probably those designated as the "word of wisdom," "the word of knowledge," and "the word of prophecy") were evidently needful for the edification of the infant Church;—for the supply of instruc-

tion, both in doctrines and in moral duties, to those whose Divine Master had not left behind Him (like Moses) a book, containing the principles of Christian faith and practice, but had left, instead, the promise of his Spirit, who should "lead them into all truth."

Such, principally, appear to have been the peculiar wants, and such the peculiar supply of those wants, in the infant Church. We have the records of inspiration in the writings of the Apostles and their followers, which supersede the necessity of inspiration in ourselves: we have the history of their miracles preserved, which, together with the result of the miracles,—the establishment and existence, at this day, of the religion,—afford a sufficient evidence of its truth, to all who are open to conviction; since experience,—now, long experience, has proved that all attempts to account for its establishment by human means, are vain. And as the blaze of the pillar which guided the Israelites in the wilderness, and proved to them the divine presence among them, was withdrawn when they were sufficiently convinced of that presence, and, as it were, familiar with the belief that the Lord

was among them as their Protector and King,—the manifestation of “the glory of the Lord” being thenceforward enclosed within the most holy place, — so, the outward and sensible marks of God’s presence in his Church, were gradually withdrawn, when sufficient evidence had been afforded of that presence; which is still not less real or less effectual than before; and which is no longer miraculously displayed, only because it has been already sufficiently proved.°

The extraordinary gifts were probably withdrawn *gradually*, in proportion as the structure, of which they were the temporary support, gradually acquired consistency. We have, accordingly, nothing recorded on the subject; indeed, much has come down to us respecting miracles, pretended to have been wrought long after the apostolic age, which we have good reason for regarding as fabulous. The Sacred

° I am indebted for this remark, and for several others in the present Essay, to that most interesting and useful work, “Hinds’s History of the Rise and Early Progress of Christianity;” first published in the Encyclopædia Metropolitana.

Writers, however, furnish us with grounds for at least a highly probable conjecture. It was through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles only, that extraordinary gifts were for the most part conferred; as may be proved from several parts of the New Testament, particularly the account in the Acts (chap. viii.) of the preaching of the Gospel by Philip the Deacon, to the Samaritans; who were afterwards favoured with a visit, chiefly, as it appears, for this express purpose, by the Apostles Peter and John. And the same may be collected from the opening of the Epistle to the Romans.

Such then being the mode in which, exclusively, miraculous powers were conveyed, (with the exception of a very few cases, including, of course, those of the Apostles themselves,) the result must have been, that when all the Apostles had terminated their course on earth, all the channels must have been stopped through which this stream had hitherto flowed; and as the last generation dropped off, one by one, of such as had been thus gifted, this extraordinary manifestation of the Spirit gradually became extinct.

§ 5. These extraordinary endowments, then, constitute one important difference between the early Christians and ourselves; but the corresponding point of resemblance is one of far higher importance: for we have no reason to suppose that that spiritual influence, which is conferred for the benefit of the individual Christian,—for his moral improvement and purification—for his support and guidance in the road to eternal life,—is bestowed in any less degree, on sincere Christians, at the present day, than formerly. Now this surely is of incomparably higher importance than the miraculous gifts we have been speaking of. These last without the other, without, that is, the proper use having been made of the other, would be utterly worthless; the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, if we so walk after it as to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, hath the “end of everlasting life.” Many, says our Saviour, shall say in that day, “Lord, we have in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many mighty works; then will I say unto them, I know you not; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity” And again, “in this rejoice not, that the devils are subject unto you; but rather

rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." And Paul in like manner, when he has been enumerating and comparing together the various extraordinary spiritual gifts, which had been a subject of emulation and dissension among the Corinthian Christians, concludes by utterly depreciating all of them in comparison of that which he calls a "more excellent way." This he designates by the word *ἀγάπη*, which in most places is rendered "love," but in the passage in question "charity." It appears, however, to have been employed in this place to denote collectively all the sanctifying efficacy,—all of what we call the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit; this gift being at once the great proof and instance of Christ's *love* to his Church,—the ground of the *love* of Christians towards their Master, and also the bond of their brotherly *love* towards each other, not as fellow-creatures merely, but as fellow-members of Christ's body. The circumstance of the Apostle's setting *ἀγάπη* above faith and hope (*πίστις* and *ἐλπίς*) not merely as the greatest of the three, but as *including* the other two, because it "*hopeth* all things, and *believeth* all things,"

(πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα πιστεύει) seems to indicate that he was not in this case confining his view to Christian benevolence alone: and if any one will compare the fruits of ἀγάπη, as enumerated in the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, with “the fruits of the *Spirit*,” in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, in the original, he will perceive such a striking coincidence in the Greek words employed in the two passages, (much more striking than an English translation exhibits,) as will leave little doubt that the same train of thought was in the writer’s mind in both instances.

It may appear superfluous, however, to adduce scriptural proofs of what is in itself so obvious as the superior value of sanctifying grace to miraculous endowments. But as long as language is employed by mankind to express their thoughts, there will always be a danger of their thoughts being influenced by language; and unless an especial attention is directed to this danger, the best-chosen expressions will ever be liable insensibly to become a snare to us. The *ordinary* and the *extraordinary* operations of the Holy Spirit have been very fitly so termed; but

these words are likely, if we are not on our guard against the danger, to suggest to us, gradually and imperceptibly, an erroneous idea. *Extraordinary* abilities place a man much above one of *ordinary*; extraordinary merit is something much greater and better than ordinary; and the like in many other cases. Such an employment, therefore, of those words, is apt to lead men insensibly to form an indistinct notion of some very superior advantage possessed by those endowed with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; especially as the title of *saints* is commonly applied in Scripture to the early *Christians*, as equivalent to that title; while by us it is limited to a few of the most eminently pious that are recorded.^p If one were even to hint at the

^p The application (among Protestants) of the title "Saint," in the present day, seems somewhat anomalous. It is never applied to the indisputably *holy* (*sancti*) and even inspired persons who lived under the Jewish dispensation; such as Moses, David, Daniel, &c., nor is it limited to such Christians (*viz.* the Apostles and Evangelists) as were confessedly *inspired*; for Protestants commonly speak of Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, &c. without attributing inspiration to them; nor again is it considered allowable to characterise by that title such men of later days as appear to us eminent for

possibility of any man's becoming, in the present day, as perfect a Christian as one of the

Christian knowledge and virtue ; as, for instance, the chief promoters and martyrs of the Reformation. All this surely tends to foster the notion that in the *earlier* ages of Christianity, some men at least were able to attain a higher degree of Christian holiness than any one can hope for, or need strive for, now.

The Romanist-system, a most complete and compact, and well-proportioned edifice, but built on a foundation of sand, seems to me in this matter, as in most others, very consistent with itself. The definition of a Saint according to that system,—of one enrolled in the list, or canonized, as it is called,—seems to be, one who is supposed to have *performed eminent works of supererogation* ; i. e. to have had more merit than sufficed for his own salvation ; the overplus being (as is well known to all who are acquainted with the doctrines of that school) stored up, as it were, in a kind of common treasury, for the benefit of the rest of the Catholic Church. And no Papist need be at a loss to know who is, and who is not, to bear the title of Saint: the names are to be found in a register, into which they are admitted by the Pope himself. All this is at least consistent, and convenient. It wants nothing but truth.

I would suggest however to Protestant-preachers the importance of frequently reminding their hearers, at least the middle and lower classes, *i. e.* a large majority of most congregations, that it is a mistake (and I believe it to be a very common one) to suppose that the admonitions and exhortations which the Apostles address to "Saints," do not

Apostles,—of any set of Christians now, attaining an equality with the best of those primitive Christians,—becoming Saints in as high a degree as those who are usually so called,—the very idea would be reprobated by many persons as an almost impious presumption; though in fact there is much more presumption in expecting God's eternal favour, while we are *content* to remain inferior.

Not that men deliberately assent to the proposition, that the power of working miracles is a better thing than a pure and holy mind; nor that they can be ignorant, if they are but moderately versed in Scripture, of the recorded imperfections of many thus gifted, even in their manner of exercising these very gifts; but the use of the word *extraordinary*, together with the perceptible and striking character of these endowments, and our habit of prizing the most highly what is *rare*, tend to leave a sort of vague impression on the

concern, or do not equally concern, Christians in the present day; or that they are “not expected to be Saints.” To assume that title indeed as *distinguishing* them from their fellow-Christians, is most presumptuous; but the Gospel-promises are limited to those who live “as becometh Saints.”

mind, of some pre-eminent sanctity in those who were partakers of them, above what is attainable in the present day. The splendid accompaniment which testified to them the reality of the spiritual influence bestowed, is apt to enhance in our minds the value of the benefit thus attested, above that which is still placed within the Christian's reach. But if we attentively consider the case, we shall be convinced that the Lord has not given to the one class of Christians any advantage over the other, in that which tends to the spiritual welfare of the individual Christian, and leads to the salvation of his soul;—that his promise to be with his Church always, and to dwell spiritually in the hearts of those who love Him and keep his saying, extends equally to all who equally strive to fulfil that, the condition of it;—and that our situation resembles that of the primitive Christians in all that is essential, and differs from it only in circumstances which were temporary and comparatively unimportant.

§ 6. Hitherto, I have been comparing together the case of the early Christians and our own,

principally with a view to the *intrinsic character of the spiritual gifts themselves*, which were promised. I shall proceed (according to the division mentioned, page 289) to offer some remarks on the *signs* by which the two classes of gifts—the influence of the Spirit in these two modes of operation, the extraordinary, and the ordinary,—are, respectively, to be recognized and ascertained. We shall hence be led to perceive some further points of difference and of resemblance, between the condition of the first Christians and our own; and may thus be more effectually guarded against each of those opposite errors, which are but too prevalent; that of neglecting or depreciating those inestimable gifts, which *are* placed within our reach; and that of pretending to, or expecting such as are not promised.

When our Lord said to his disciples, “If ye have *Faith*, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done,” it is plain that the Faith, which in this and in several other passages He was inculcating on

them, is not to be understood of mere belief in Jesus as the Messiah, or in the doctrines of his religion; or of trust, generally, in divine power and goodness. It evidently has reference to miraculous powers, such as are not bestowed on all Christians; though Faith, in another sense, is required by all. But in this and other declarations of like import, there can be little doubt that our Saviour had in view, *confidence in those admonitions and injunctions which his disciples and many others of the early Christians received, authorizing and empowering them to work certain miracles.* Their extraordinary gifts were not at their own command. Even Paul, who performed so many mighty works, and, among others, possessed the gift of healing in a high degree, yet was not always permitted to exert this gift, even in favour of his dearest friends.¹ A special commission seems to have been requisite to enable them to exercise their delegated powers. And this was conveyed to them,—their permission and call to perform miracles, was announced to them,—in various ways. During our Lord's

¹ See 2 Tim. iv. 20.

abode on earth in the flesh, He Himself, whose authority they could not doubt, uttered commands to this purpose with his own lips. Besides the general commission given to the Apostles and to the Seventy, we find Him on one occasion giving a precise direction to Peter to cast a hook into the sea, and to take the fish that first came up, in whose mouth he should find the piece of money (a Stater) which the exigency required: in another instance, He, at the request of the same Apostle, commissioned him to come and meet Him on the surface of the water. Peter seems to have well understood that his Master's command was at once requisite and sufficient to enable him to tread the waves without sinking. But even after he had begun to experience the efficacy of that command, his faith was shaken by alarm, and he began to sink, and was reproached by his Master for his doubts. The faith in which he was in this instance found deficient, seems to have been precisely that which our Lord on other occasions so earnestly inculcated.

After our Lord's ascension, some other kind of indication must have been given, by which those who were on each occasion authorized to work

any miracle, might know that they *were* thus empowered. A species of revelation, in short, must have been bestowed, informing them what they were enabled and required to perform; and in this revelation they were required to have a full faith. Whatever mode may have been, in each case, employed for conveying this revelation, the indication given must always have been something in which they could not be mistaken — something as free from all doubt or suspicion as the words which they heard Jesus utter while with them; since otherwise, this unhesitating faith could not reasonably have been required of them. It must have been something, therefore, which could not possibly be confounded with any suggestions of their own minds.

This is a point concerning which we have no precise statements in Scripture; but the nature of the case puts it, I think, beyond a doubt, that the intimations or signs we are speaking of, must always have been accompanied by, or connected with, something *sensibly* miraculous. For otherwise we must suppose the disciples to have been left exposed to a double danger; that of

mistaking any remarkable dream, or impression on their waking minds, from natural causes, for a communication from the Spirit; in which case they would have given faith to a delusion, and have been disappointed in their expectations, contrary to our Lord's express promise; and that of mistaking, on the other hand, some heavenly communication for an ordinary dream or thought; in which case they would have failed in faith without any fault of their own. God certainly would not leave his servants in any such uncertainty; and they could not possibly be secured from it in any way but by the intervention of sensible miracles.

I have said, however, that the intimation in question must be either accompanied by, or *connected with*, some sensible miracle, because such a proof to the party concerned, of his not being deluded, as would be necessary in the *first instance*, might be dispensed with afterwards, when some particular mode of communication had been once stamped, as it were, with the signature of divinity, by some plainly miraculous accompaniment.^r A particular sort of internal

^r "Hinds's History," &c. p. 187. Vol. I.

sensation, for instance, or mental emotion, which a man might experience, however strikingly different it might be from his ordinary feelings, he would be very rash in regarding as a signal of inspiration; since he could not possibly tell that it was not a symptom of disease, or of some other natural change; but if he experienced something of this kind in immediate connexion with a miraculous phenomenon, to which his senses, and those of others, could testify, the recurrence of this peculiar sensation or perception afterwards, would then be of itself justly regarded by him as a heaven-sent intimation. For instance, a man may dream, or, if in an excited state of mind, may fancy, that he hears a voice addressing him, when there is no such thing; but when Paul, on his road to Damascus, was struck to the ground, and blinded by a blaze of light, he thus received the assurance of a sensible miracle; then it was that he heard himself addressed in the awful voice of the Lord Jesus. He afterwards, as he tells us, received from Him, at various times, revelations concerning the Gospel. Now if, as is most probable, this revelation was communicated to him

by that same voice,—(even though unaccompanied by the supernatural light)—a voice which could not but be strongly impressed on his memory, he would be in no more danger of delusion, than any of us, in holding communication with a well-known friend.

Again, when two of the disciples met with their Master lately risen from the grave, as they were going to Emmaus, their senses were at first preternaturally obscured, so that they did not recognize Him; but they seemed to have experienced, while He was talking with them, a certain remarkable inward sensation, not noticed by them at the time, which they described by their “ hearts burning within them : ” now this may indeed have been no more than a natural and ordinary emotion, elicited by the interesting character of the discourse they were hearing: it *may*, however, have been something peculiar; and the remarkable circumstances of the case (especially their eyes being “ holden that they should not know Him, ”) render this not very improbable. It is certainly not impossible; and therefore at any rate we may frame such a

supposition for illustration's sake : suppose then, as is at least conceivable, this were a sensation altogether different from any thing they had ever before experienced ; its recurrence on any subsequent occasion, would be justly regarded by them, from the miraculous circumstances accompanying its first occurrence, as a token of their Lord's presence, though unseen,* and a notice that they were to regard as a communication from his Spirit, the ideas conveyed to their minds through this vehicle.

But whenever (as has often been the case with those of an enthusiastic temperament in later

* Whether in this particular instance the fact were or were not such as I have supposed, makes no difference to the present argument ; the object being only to illustrate my meaning. [See "Elements of Rhetoric," Part I. Chap. iii. § 3.] It is worth observing, however, that our Lord must have had *some* design in thus presenting Himself to his disciples invisible ; invisible that is, *as* their Master, Jesus : and his design, or at least part of it, *may* have been, to teach them the meaning of a certain peculiar internal impression, denoting his presence in the Spirit. The *sensation*, and its *peculiarity*, their own consciousness would testify ; its *meaning* would be explained to them by their Lord's afterwards opening their eyes, so that they knew who it was that had been with them.

times) we find a person strongly *suspecting* that he has received a revelation, or fully convinced of it, from feeling (as they sometimes express it) a certain thought forcibly borne in upon his mind, we may be quite sure that he is deluding himself. God would never leave any doubt, or any reasonable ground for doubt, on the mind of any one to whom he might think fit to impart a revelation; He doubtless never did, nor ever will, communicate any one of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, without attesting, to the person or persons concerned, its reality, by the stamp of some sensible miracle.

The Apostle Paul, accordingly, we find *enabled* to distinguish, and *careful* to distinguish the fullest convictions of his own understanding, from divine revelations.⁴ During his last journey to

⁴ An admirable instance of this case, may be seen in I Cor. vii. Any such directions as he *might have been supposed* to deliver on divine authority, on points whereon he had received "no commandment from the Lord," he is careful, though he could not but wish his advice to be followed, to point out as merely the suggestions of his own judgment. In points unconnected with religion, such as the directions he gives about bringing his cloak and his books from Troas, as it would be absurd to suppose any

Jerusalem that is recorded in the Acts, he was strongly impressed with the expectation that he

inspiration, so there was no need that he should disavow it.

And this applies to such purely historical passages in the sacred writers as involve no religious doctrine or precept. It is childish therefore to allege errors, real or imaginary, of this nature, as reasons for doubting either the truth of Christianity or the inspiration of our sacred writers. If indeed they can be proved to have written like men so ill-acquainted with the time, places, and occurrences, they speak of, as to show that they could not really have been what they profess, this is an objection of a different kind; and on this question we may safely join issue. But when we are told of a blind man healed by Jesus, according to one Evangelist (Mark x. 46) as He was going *out of* Jericho, and according to another (Luke xviii. 35) as He was coming *into* Jericho, it seems obvious that one of the two was mistaken as to this circumstance;—a circumstance so utterly insignificant, that it would be extravagant to expect that the Holy Spirit should interfere to correct the mistake. And any one who should, on such a ground, deny the occurrence of the miracle, or the general fidelity of the writers, would be acting on a principle which if adhered to in ordinary life, would be regarded as a symptom of utter mental imbecility.

There are other points again in which we could have no ground for conjecturing, *from the nature of the case*, whether supernatural guidance took place or not: as, for example, when the Apostle Paul changed his first design of going into Bithynia

should there close his career by a violent death. He took leave of the Elders of Ephesus with an assurance of his complete conviction that they should see his face no more; but he knew that this his conjecture (which, all things considered, was a very probable one, though the event did not agree with it) was merely a conjecture, and not a revelation. He had received a divine admonition to take this journey, together with a

and proceeded to Troas, there is no reason why this alteration of plan might not have been regarded as the result of his own natural judgment, but that we are expressly told that "the Spirit suffered them not" to enter Bithynia; (Acts xvi. 6, 7.) In this case therefore either there was a supernatural interference, or the writer is guilty of a direct falsehood. This is a distinction most important to be remembered, as it has been overlooked by eminent writers. Many of the enactments of the Mosaic law again, are, in themselves, such as we might conceive to have been framed by the natural wisdom of Moses; and his detaining the Israelites forty years in the wilderness, is not a measure on which we could pronounce, from internal evidence, that it could not have been the result of his own judgment. But when we find him distinctly declaring that he had received express commands from the Lord on these points, no alternative remains but either to admit that these were Divine appointments, or to impute to Moses a deliberate imposture.

warning of approaching persecutions; but the ultimate event was as yet hidden from him: "Behold, I go bound in the Spirit" unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city that bonds and afflictions abide me."

Inspirations, however, and other miraculous gifts, we have (as has been already observed) no reason to expect in these days. Not, however, that we are authorized to assert confidently that nothing of the kind ever will recur; but thus far we *may* be confident, that if it does, it will be accompanied by sufficient evidence to distinguish clearly a miraculous interposition, from imposture or delusion.

§ 7. The signs then by which the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were announced, constitute (as well as those gifts themselves) a point of difference between the early Christians and their successors: there is a resemblance, and, as we have every reason to conclude, an equality, between the

* That is, I imagine, knowing by the revelation of the Divine Spirit, that he was to be *bound*.

condition of the infant Church and our own, in respect of that far more important point, the ordinary grace of the Holy Spirit operating in the sanctification of the heart. What then is the sign of *this* gift?—the token by which we may be assured of “God’s working in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure?” *This* operation of the Spirit, there is every reason to believe, not only is, but always was, *imperceptible*, and undistinguishable, except by its fruits, from the ordinary workings of the human mind. For if it was suggested to the mind of one of the first Christians, that he ought to do this or that, and suggested in such a manner (which sometimes was the case) as to afford him a satisfactory assurance of an immediate command from the Holy Ghost, this would clearly be a case of *revelation*, and, consequently, would belong to the other class of spiritual gifts;—not to that which we are now considering. But we may be sure that they were not, even the most highly gifted of them, thus guided by immediate revelation in *all* the actions of their lives; but were left to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling; though still encouraged to do this by the

assurance that God wrought in them. They were accordingly not uniformly *infallible*; for we find a dissension arising between Paul and Barnabas; nor was this settled by any miraculous interposition, or authoritative declaration of the Spirit, to either of them. And again, we find Paul withstanding and censuring Peter; but at the same time using *arguments* to convince him of his error; not charging him with having wilfully rebelled against any express immediate revelation respecting the particular act in question.

In fact, the early Christians could hardly have been moral agents, if they had not been left watchfully to regulate their own conduct according to the best of their judgment, but had in every case recognized the immediate dictates of the Holy Spirit forbidding or enjoining each action of their lives. And yet they were taught that in *all* their conduct the assistance of God's Spirit was requisite, and was promised to them; our Lord Himself told them that without Him they "could do nothing;" and the Apostle's encouragement to them to work out their own salvation, is, "it is God that worketh in you."

But how then were they, and how are we, to

know what are these suggestions of the sanctifying Spirit? Our Lord Himself seems to instruct us that we are to judge by the effects, when He says, “the wind (*πνεῦμα*) bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born (*τοῦ πνεύματος*) of the Spirit.” He here seems to have in view the ordinary and universal operations of the Holy Spirit,—those which extend to “*every one* that is born of the Spirit,” without which, “*no one* can enter into the kingdom of Heaven.” And as we judge of the direction of any wind that blows (though itself invisible) by its effects,—by the *direction* in which it impels the bodies moved by it,—so we must decide whether we are in each instance influenced by God’s Holy Spirit, or by our own corrupt desires and the spirit of the Evil one, by observing the direction in which we are impelled; whether to holiness or to sin,—towards a conformity or an opposition to the example of our great Master,—the word of his inspired servants, and the moral law which is written on our conscience, though the characters be so far obscured as not to be traced without

diligent study. The Apostle, in like manner, when exhorting his converts to be "led by the Spirit," and to "walk after the Spirit," evidently refers them to a similar test, by enumerating the principal of the *fruits* of the Spirit, and contrasting them with "the works of the flesh," which, he says, "are manifest."

From these considerations it will appear how much those are in error, who imagine that such as have attained a very high degree of Christian perfection, and are eminently under the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, will be able distinctly to perceive, by a peculiarity of immediate sensation, and thus to distinguish from their own natural thoughts, the suggestions of the Holy Ghost.* If this his ordinary operation,—this grace which guides and assists the Christian

* This error is ably exposed in a very sensible and well-written article in the Quarterly Review, (No. 59, Art. 8, April, 1824.) I am sorry not to be able to bestow equally unqualified praise on another article, (No. 61, Art. 2, Dec. 1824,) apparently by the same hand, and on the same general subject. The author's just dread of one extreme, has led him to use expressions which may be thought to favour an opposite extreme, not less erroneous or less dangerous.

“to will and to do what is well-pleasing to God,” *always was* (as there seems good reason to conclude) insensible, we may be well assured that it always will be so. As on the one hand, even the lowest of the extraordinary spiritual gifts alluded to by Paul must always have been accompanied with a distinct manifestation of its super-human origin, so as to prevent the possibility of its being mistaken for an exercise of any natural power; so, on the other hand, even the very highest degree of purifying grace, is, and always was, undistinguishable from the exercise of the natural powers, except by the holiness which is the result. The “carnal mind,” and the “spiritual mind,” are to be known, respectively, by “the works of the flesh,” and the “fruits of the Spirit.” It is, 1st, by the inclinations of our hearts; 2dly, by our deliberations towards the accomplishment of our wishes; and, 3dly, by the actions which are the result of these, that we must know what spirit we are of; for it is from God that “*all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works* do proceed.”

Another error, opposite to the one just considered, is that of those who acknowledge, in

general terms, the existence and the necessity of the ordinary operations of the Spirit, but explain them away in each particular case; and thus completely nullify the doctrine. They allow that Christians are to expect the sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost; but each separate work in which this divine agency can possibly operate, they attribute exclusively and entirely to some other cause. If a man resist temptation, they attribute this to his sense of the folly and danger and sinfulness of yielding to it; and thence deny that spiritual influence was concerned in the case: if he improve in religious knowledge, they attribute this, exclusively, to his diligence in learning, and to the advantage of good instruction; and, accordingly, contend that there is no need in such a case to suppose spiritual influence concerned: if he does any act, or entertains any sentiment, which right reason would approve, they regard this as a proof that to right reason alone it is to be referred: and by this means they exclude, one by one, every possible instance in which the *ordinary* grace of the Spirit *can* operate; for any thing which could *not* be traced to any natural cause, would

clearly be miraculous. But a doctrine which is true generally, cannot be false in every particular instance. In fact, what we mean by the ordinary operation of the Holy Spirit, is his operation through second causes,—his aid to our endeavours,—his blessing upon the means of grace. We are taught to pray for our daily bread as God's gift, though it is not, like manna, showered miraculously from the skies; and every christian thought and word and deed is no less "from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," though it come not accompanied with fiery tongues and the "sound of a mighty wind." Its christian goodness is the sign of its spiritual origin.

§ 8. Such then is, and ever was, the criterion to Christians of their being "led by the Spirit." The sign of their having a *claim* to this spiritual guidance—to the ordinary operation of the Spirit—of their being admitted to a share in the *offer* of this grace, I cannot conceive to be, or ever to have been, any other than their baptism into the christian faith. There are some, indeed, who represent baptism as a sign

only of admission into the visible Church, and not, necessarily, of spiritual regeneration. But the shortest and most decisive answer to these persons appears to be, that they are making a distinction without a difference. Such as the Church is described in Scripture, viz. "as the body of Christ Jesus," as the "Temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in it," to speak of admittance into this Church, without an admission to the privileges bestowed on it, seems a contradiction in terms. The promises of Christ are made to the *Society* of which He is the Head; and to individuals, not as *men*, but as *members* of that Society. If (in the case of temporal goods) any one is admitted a member of any endowed society, he is thereby admitted to a share of its revenues: it would be a contradiction to disjoin them. The visible Church of Christ is a society endowed by Him with the richest privileges: but then, it rests with each member of that society to *avail* himself aright of those privileges, or to neglect or abuse them.

The case of Christians is in this respect analogous to that of God's People of old. (*See* Essay III.) All the Israelites were admitted

into covenant with the Lord; and, being made thus his “peculiar,” “holy,” and “elect” people, were entitled to *all* the privileges and promises of that covenant, though it rested with each individual to make a good or an ill use of these advantages. The Lord was ready to perform his part, if they would perform theirs; but if they refused this, still they were not allowed to draw back from the engagement, but incurred the heavier judgment for their disobedience. The rebellious were not permitted, as they desired, “to return into Egypt,” but were cut off in the wilderness.

And the *infants* of the Israelites were admitted into this covenant by the rite of circumcision, at the age of eight days; though they were, of course, then, incapable of *immediately* enjoying or understanding their privileges. If this had been sufficiently attended to, it might have obviated the difficulties that have been raised from the consideration that such as are baptized in infancy cannot be, at once, nor till they become moral agents, actually influenced by the Holy Spirit; whence it has been inferred by some, that the new birth does not necessarily take

place at baptism: while the Anabaptists (who alone act consistently with these views) contending that we should not put asunder what God has joined together,—the sign, and the “inward spiritual grace, or thing signified,”—accordingly defer baptism till the party is arrived at years of discretion.

But after all, there is no more difficulty in the case than in one which occurs every day; that of an infant inheriting an estate. He is incapable, at the time, of using or comprehending the advantage; but still it is *his*; he is not hereafter to *acquire the title and claim* to it; but he will hereafter become capable of understanding his claim and employing his wealth; and he will become responsible at the same time for the use made of it.

Christians in like manner are called upon at their peril, to make the best use of their advantages, as soon as they become capable of understanding them: and if they fail to do this, they are not on that account esteemed as never having been admitted to those advantages, but, on the contrary, incur, on that very ground, the heavier condemnation. What, “know ye not,” says the

Apostle, “that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in you? and if any man defile (*φθείρει*) the temple of God, him will God destroy,” (*φθερεί*).

It is then, and ever was, a matter of faith, to believe in the continual sanctifying presence of God with his Church; and in “the communion of saints,” viz. the participation of all Christians, as far as they will avail themselves of the offer, in the assistance of that Holy Spirit, from which every good and every perfect gift proceeds.^y

In this respect our case and that of the early Christians coincide. But there is this point of difference between the two; that this was not to them, as to us, the great trial of their faith; because in the infant Church, the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit served as a visible token to convince them of his actual presence. The same Spirit still resides in the Church; but

^y Doubtless one of the objects of our Lord, in the institution of the Eucharist, was to remind Christians of this “communion” or fellowship of the Holy Ghost, and to impress it habitually on their minds.—See Note B at the end of this Volume.

like the Shechinah concealed within the Holy of Holies, it is screened from our view; we walk wholly "by faith, and not by sight." They, however, had counterbalancing trials: the fellowship in the Spirit, of Jews and Gentiles;—to the one party the admission of the unclean heathen as fellow-heirs with the favoured children of Abraham;—to the other, the reception of a religion and of a divine Master, from a nation of obscure barbarians, despised and detested for superstition, both that Master and his ministers being rejected and abhorred even by that nation itself;—in short, "Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks, foolishness," constituted a trial to their faith which we can hardly estimate. The indignities which Jesus suffered, who was thence esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted,—the contradiction which the new religion presented to all the fondly-cherished hopes of the Jew, to all that the Gentile most revered in philosophy, and was most attached to in his religion and in his habits of life,—the inveterate malice of persecutors,—the scorn and derision of the wisest and greatest,—the censures, entreaties, and lamentations, of

kindred and friends,—all these, and numberless other circumstances revolting to every prejudice—every feeling—every habit of the new convert, formed a trial to his faith, of which we can form but a faint idea ; and under which it was needful that his gracious Master should support him, by a constant visible display of his presence.

§ 9. It is the part of Christians of the present day, on the one hand not to distrust the reality of that presence, because it is no longer thus miraculously displayed ; nor, on the other hand, to require or look for such a miraculous manifestation as God has thought fit no longer to bestow. How we *should* have conducted ourselves, if placed in the circumstances of the primitive Christians, can be known only to the Searcher of hearts ; how we *shall* conduct ourselves under the circumstances in which we *are* actually placed,—how we shall withstand our own trials, and make use of our own advantages,—is the point which most concerns us ; since of that we shall have to give an account.

And if we would profit by the example of the most eminent of God's servants, we must in some

respects reverse their procedure, in conformity with the reversed circumstances in which we are placed. We must endeavour to learn and to perform, as far as we are able, by our natural powers, under the blessing of God's ordinary operations, what the apostles were taught, or were empowered to do, by miraculous gifts: and the instruction *they* derived from their own, or from each other's immediate inspiration, we must seek to obtain in the *records* of that inspiration which they have left us. They could in many instances infer this or that to be right or true, *from its being the suggestion of the Spirit*; which was attested, to themselves and to others, by miracles: we, on the contrary, can only prove any thing to be the suggestion of the Spirit, *by its being right and true*; and the evidence of *this*, must be sought in Scripture,—that record of the dictates of the Holy Ghost, which is the appointed standard for deciding what does proceed from the Author of all good. If our life and faith are agreeable to the Gospel, this is the ground of confidence that they are right; and if right, they must come from that sanctifying and

enlightening and supporting grace, which alone can raise to life the dead in sin, and purify man's corrupt nature, and effectually open his eyes to the truth, and "strengthen the feeble knees" to walk in God's paths. This spiritual assistance is not (like the other) a proof on which to build and support our faith, but is itself a matter of faith;—a truth to be believed on God's assurances. And these persons, therefore, are in fact *wanting* in faith (of which they often pretend to a pre-eminent degree) who are not satisfied with this assurance, but look for, and pretend to, sensible experiences, which are to afford a direct and decisive demonstration to their minds of their being under spiritual influence: "except they see signs and wonders, they will not believe."

We are to look then to the Holy Scriptures which the Spirit of Christ inspired, not indeed (according to the notion some have maintained) as constituting the *only* assistance that the Holy Ghost now bestows on the Church, but as constituting the ultimate standard by which we are to *judge* how far we have received and are profiting by that assistance. It is not in these

only that He *is present*, but it is by these, as a test, that his presence is, in each case, to be *known*.

It is, indeed, only through the enlightening and supporting grace of the Holy Spirit, that even the Scriptures themselves can be consulted with benefit. If we study them with a mind biassed by any of those numerous prejudices and infirmities which beset our frail nature, we shall receive the heavenly light of God's word through a discoloured medium; and its rays will thence give an unnatural tint to every thing on which they are shed. Many different persons, accordingly, have arrived at different conclusions (*all* which consequently could not be correct), though they have applied, apparently at least, the very test that has been recommended: they have compared their opinions and practices with the standard of God's word, and finding them agree, have concluded them to be the suggestions of the Spirit which dictated that word; and yet this agreement has perhaps been (*must* have been, in some instances) the result of a partial and prejudiced interpretation of Scripture; they may have suffered

those opinions and practices to *bend the ruler*² by which they were to be measured.

But how, after all (it may be said), is this danger to be completely avoided? Are we not involved in a vicious circle, if we are to judge whether we are under the influence of the Spirit by consulting the Scriptures, and yet cannot without that influence, interpret aright those very Scriptures? How, in short, are we to arrive at a completely satisfactory decision as to our own sentiments and conduct?

The danger is one against which we never *can* be completely secured in this life: the decisions we attain can never be wholly exempt from all ground for doubt: in other words, we must not expect, with our utmost efforts and prayers, to attain perfect *infallibility*. If we could, this life would hardly be any longer a state of trial. To contend against the difficulty in question,—to labour not only with diligence and patience, but “with fear and trembling” also, that is, with anxious and humble self-distrust,—is the very task assigned us in this our state of preparation.

² Arist. Rhet. Book I. chap. i.

But if, while the Christian puts forth all his own powers in this task, he at the same time earnestly and importunately prays for heavenly guidance, and relies with deep humility on Him who alone can crown those efforts with success, he will be continually approaching nearer and nearer to “a right judgment in all things,” and to a corresponding perfection of life.

And in referring to and studying the Scriptures, though no infallible interpreter is to be found, or hoped for,—no system of general directions that will absolutely secure us against mistake; yet there are two maxims especially, (already adverted to in these Essays,) which, studiously dwelt upon, and perpetually recalled to our thoughts, will prove a safeguard against many and various errors. The one is, to remember that in studying the Scriptures we are consulting the Spirit of *Truth*; and therefore must, if we would hope for his aid, search honestly and earnestly *for the truth*, not, for a confirmation of our pre-conceived notions, or a justification of the system, or the practice, to which we may be inclined. This maxim is the more frequently transgressed, from men’s falsely

persuading themselves that they *have* complied with it: the conclusions which they arrive at, they, of course, believe to be true; and thence, from their having, as they suppose, *found* truth, they take for granted that it was for truth they were *seeking*. But a desire to have Scripture on our side is one thing; and a sincere desire to be on the side of Scripture, is another.

And, finally, in combination with this rule, we should also keep constantly in mind, that, of seeking in Scripture not only for truth, but for *practical* truth, with a view to the improvement of our life and heart: this is an express condition on which spiritual aid in enlightening the understanding is promised: "if any man will *do* the will of God, he shall *know* of the doctrine." We must seek therefore in the Scriptures, by the aid of Him who gave them, not for speculative knowledge respecting the intrinsic nature of God, or of the human soul, but for practical knowledge concerning the *relations* existing between God and the soul of man, that we may be enabled to serve and please Him the better; and that "the inspiration of his Holy Spirit may cleanse the thoughts of our hearts," and fit us for enjoying

the more immediate presence of our Master in his triumphant kingdom. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may *do* all the words of this law."

APPENDIX.

NOTE A, to ESSAY V. p. 185.

I HAVE already (Essay I. § 5, p. 45) hinted my suspicions, that some persons, who do not really believe the Mosaic Law relative to the Sabbath, to be binding on Christians, yet think it right to encourage or tacitly connive at, that belief, from views of expediency, for fear of unsettling the minds of the common people. But there are many, no doubt, who maintain the same tenet from sincere conviction. Some again there are, who conceive the observance of the Lord's day to be founded, not on the authority of the Decalogue, but on a supposed command given to all mankind at the creation; the force of which, as it was antecedent to the Mosaic Law, cannot, of course, be affected by its abolition. These views, though I cannot coincide in them, are not, it is plain, at all at variance with what has been said in the fifth Essay.

But the opinion, that Christians are bound to the hallowing of the Lord's day, in obedience to the fourth commandment, goes to nullify all that I have there urged; since it implies that there is a *part*, at least, of the Mosaic Law binding on Christians; I should say, the

whole; for since the fourth commandment is evidently not a moral, but a *positive* precept, (it being a thing in itself indifferent, antecedent to any command, whether the seventh day, or the sixth, or the eighth, be observed), I cannot conceive how the consequence can be avoided, that “we are debtors to keep the whole Law,” ceremonial as well as moral. The dogma of the “Assembly of Divines at Westminster,”—(in their “confession of faith,” chap. xxi. § 7)—that the observance of the Sabbath is part of the moral Law—is to me utterly unintelligible. Yet unless we assent to this, adopting some such sense of the term “moral” as it is difficult even to imagine, I do not see on what principle we can, consistently, admit the authority of the fourth commandment, and yet claim exemption from the prohibition of certain meats, and of blood,—the rite of circumcision,—or, indeed, any part of the Levitical Law. But to those who fear that the reverence due to the Lord’s day would be left without support, should we deny the obligation of the Mosaic Law, I would suggest two considerations, either of which would alone be sufficient to show that their apprehensions are entirely groundless:

1st, that there is no mention of the Lord’s day in the Mosaic Law.

2dly, that the power of the Church, bestowed by Christ Himself, would alone (even independent of Apostolic example and ancient usage) be amply sufficient to sanction and enforce the observance.

To seek, therefore, for support for an institution

which is "bound on earth" by the Church of Christ, and which, consequently, He has promised to "bind in heaven," among the abrogated ordinances of the Mosaic Law, where, after all, it is not to be found, is to remove it from a foundation of rock to place it on one of sand: it is to "seek for the living among the dead."

In saying that there is no mention of the Lord's day in the Mosaic Law, I mean, that there is not only no mention of that specific festival which Christians observe, on the *first* day of the week, in memory of our Lord's resurrection on the morning following the Jewish Sabbath, but there is not (as has sometimes been incautiously stated) any injunction to sanctify one day in seven. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, we never hear of keeping holy *some one* day in every seven, but *the* seventh day, as the day on which "God rested from all his work." The difference, accordingly, between the Jews and the Christians is not a difference of *reckoning*; which would be a matter of no importance.^a Our computation is the same as theirs. They, as well as we, reckon Saturday as the seventh day of the week; and they keep it holy *as* the seventh day, in memory of God's resting from the work of creation;

^a When Pitcairn's Island, in the South Seas, was visited by an English ship for the first time after its settlement by the remnant of the mutineers of the *Bounty*, our voyagers, on the day they arrived, which, to them, was Saturday, found the islanders observing Sunday: an obvious result of the circumstance that the *Bounty* and the other ship had arrived at the same spot by sailing from England in opposite directions. This is an instance of a mere difference of reckoning. Both parties designed to observe the *same* festival, though they kept it on different days.

we keep holy the *first* day of the week, *as* the first, in memory of our Master's rising from the dead on the day after the Sabbath.

Now, surely it is presumptuous to say, that we are at liberty to *alter* a divine command, whose authority we admit to be binding on us, on the ground that it matters not whether this day or that be set apart as a Sabbath, provided we obey the divine injunction to observe *a* Sabbath. One of the recorded offences, we should remember, of "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," was his instituting a feast unto the Lord on the fifteenth day of the tenth month, "*even the day that he had devised of his own heart.*" The Samaritans, who "worshipped they knew not what," perhaps acted on a similar principle when they built a Temple on Mount Gerizim; though that was not "the place which the Lord had chosen to put his name there:" and so perhaps did Naaman the Syrian, when he proposed to "wash in the rivers of Damascus, and be clean," instead of Jordan. One river is as good as another; one mountain as good as another;—one day as good as another; *except when there is a divine command which specifies one*; and then it is our part not to alter, or to question, a divine command, but to consider whether it extends to us, and, if it does, to obey it.

I cannot, therefore, but think that the error was less, of those early Christians, who, conceiving the injunction relative to the sabbath to be binding on them, obeyed it just as it was given, (provided they did not, contrary to the Apostles' injunction, Rom. xiv. 2—6,

presume to judge their brethren who thought differently), than of those who, admitting the eternal obligation of the precept, yet presume to alter it on the authority of tradition. Surely if we allow that the "Tradition of the Church" is competent to change the express commands of God, we are falling into one of the most dangerous errors of the Romanists; and this, while we loudly censure them for presuming to refuse the cup to the laity at the Lord's supper, on the authority of their Church, though Christ said to his disciples, "drink ye *all* of this;" and for pleading tradition in behalf of saint-worship, &c.

But in the present case there is not even any tradition to the purpose. It is not merely that the Apostles left us no command perpetuating the observance of the Sabbath, and transferring the day from the seventh to the first; such a change certainly would have been authorized by their express injunction, and by nothing short of that; since an express divine command can be abrogated or altered only by the same power, and by the same distinct revelation by which it was delivered.^b But not only is there no such Apostolic *injunction*, than which nothing less would be sufficient; there is not even any *tradition* of their having made such a change; nay, more, it is even abundantly plain that they made *no* such change. There are, indeed, sufficiently plain marks of the early Christians having observed the

^b Accordingly I have pointed out, in Essay V. the Apostle's distinct and repeated declarations, that the Mosaic Law is not binding on Christians.

Lord's day as a religious festival, even from the very resurrection, John xx. 19, 26; Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xvi. 2; Rev. i. 10: but so far were they from *substituting* this for the Jewish sabbath, that all of them who were *Jews*, actually continued, themselves, to observe not only the Mosaic Sabbath, but the whole of the Levitical Law;^c while to the *Gentile* converts they said, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the *Sabbath day*: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is Christ."

And if we come down to later ages of the Church, we not only find no allusion to any such tradition, but we find the contrary distinctly implied both in the writings of the early fathers, and in those of the most eminent of the founders of our Reformation; *e.g.* in Cranmer's Catechism, published in 1548, viz. the first year of Edward VI. we find the following passage:—"And here note, good children, that the Jewes in the Old Testament were commanded to keep the Sabbath day, and they observed it every seventh day, called the Sabbat or Satterday. But we Christian men in the New Testament are not bound to such commandments of Moses' Law concerning differences of times, days, and meats, but have liberty and freedom to use other days for our Sabbath dayes, therein to hear the word of God, and keep an holy rest. And, therefore, that this Christian liberty may be kept and maintained, we

^c Acts xvi. 3. and xxi. 20—27, &c.

now keep no more the Sabbath on Saturday as the Jews do; but we observe the Sundays and certain other days, as the magistrates do judge convenient, whom in this thing we ought to obey."

By the authority of the *Magistrate*, Cranmer evidently meant that of the *Church*; the government of which would, of course, be in the hands of the civil magistrate, in such a Church as our Reformers contemplated; viz. a strictly *National* Church; in which each subject of the State is necessarily, as such, a member of the Church, also. In fact, the notion I am contending against, seems, as far as I can collect, to have originated with the Puritans not much more than 200 years ago: and to have been for a considerable time confined to them; though it was subsequently adopted by several members of our Church.^d

^d See "Heylin's History of the Sabbath:" and also the Bishop of Lincoln's Selections from the Writings of Justin. We learn from this father, that the early Christians commemorated on Sunday (not the end, but) the beginning of the creation, in which God gave *light* to the natural world, as well as the resurrection of Christ, the beginning of the new spiritual creation,—the "light to enlighten all nations." This serves to explain, in some measure, the reference which the Christian festival, as well as the Jewish, has been generally supposed to have to the creation. The one refers to the opening, the other to the close of it.

The recurrence of the Christian festival every *seven* days, (rather than once in a decade, or in a month, &c.) that is, the adoption by Christians of the division of time into *weeks*, may easily be traced to the circumstance of their having derived their religion from Jews, who used this mode of reckoning time.

The greater part of what I have said will apply to the opinion of those also, who rest the observance of the Lord's day, not indeed on the Mosaic Law, but on a *supposed* command to Adam, (for none is *recorded*) implied in the declaration that the Lord hallowed the seventh day, because in that, He rested from the work of creation. But to these persons I would suggest, in addition to what has been urged, that it is not said in Genesis, that the Lord hallowed the seventh day at *that time*, but, *for that reason*; and as Moses was writing for the Israelites, who were charged to keep the Sabbath, it was natural that, when recording the creation in six days, he should advert to the day which *they* observed in commemoration of it. This, I say, he would naturally have done, even had there never been any such observance till the delivery of the Law from Sinai: just as any writer now, who should notice, in a summary of Gospel-history, the "Annunciation" to the Virgin Mary, might naturally remark that this is the event which Christians annually celebrate under the title of "our Lady's Day;" without at all meaning to imply that the festival was instituted at this or that period. It is, however, I think, more probable than not, that the Patriarchs had some Sabbatical observance; though less strict than the Levitical Law enjoined; else, "the Lord's Sabbaths" would hardly have been called a "*sign* between Him and the children of Israel."^e No such injunction however to the Patriarchs is *recorded*.

^e Ezekiel, *passim*.

But if any persons are convinced that it was given to Adam, and also conclude, thence, that it must bind all his posterity, they are of course, at least equally, bound by the (recorded) precept to Noah relative to abstinence from blood. Any one who admits these obligations, and complies with them *just as they were given*, observing not the first, but the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath, is acting on a system, which, though it may be erroneous, is at least intelligible and consistent. But he who acknowledges a divine command to extend to himself, ought to have an equally express divine command to sanction any *alteration* in it. Those Christians of the present day, however, who admit the obligation of the ancient Sabbath, have yet taken the liberty to change not only the *day*, but also the *mode* of observance. I believe they sometimes allege that the Jews were overscrupulous on this point, and had superadded by their tradition burdensome restrictions not authorized by the Mosaic Law. This is true; but if we shelter ourselves under this plea,—if we admit the authority of the written law, and reject merely the pharisaical additions to it,—we are then surely bound to comply at least with the express directions which *are* written; for instance, (Exod. xxxv. 2, 3.) “Ye shall *kindle no fire* throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath-day;” no one can pretend is a traditional precept; yet I know of no Christians who profess to observe it. Perhaps we may be told that it is a regulation not suited to our climate. That may be an additional reason, of some weight, for believing that the

Jewish Sabbath was an ordinance not designed to be of universal obligation; but seems hardly sufficient, if it *were* of universal obligation, to authorize Christians to depart from the divinely-appointed mode of observing it. I do not however know of any Christians who take this liberty on the plea of absolute necessity, and who do comply with the precept, in summer-time, and in warmer countries.

It is worth observing by the way, that though the Pharisees certainly had encumbered the observance of the Sabbath with needless restrictions, it is a mistake to suppose (as I believe some do) that in all, or most of the cases in which they took offence at the conduct of Jesus in respect of this point, his design was to reprove them for such over scrupulosity, and to point out in what way the Sabbath ought to be kept according to the institution of Moses. In a few instances this was the case: but in far the greater number, it will be plainly seen, on a careful examination of the accounts given by the Evangelists, that Jesus did decidedly and avowedly violate the Sabbath; on purpose, as it should seem, to assert, in this way, his divine authority. For instance, when He healed the cripple at the pool of Bethesda,^f He com-

^f John v. 8—18. Where, by the way, the Evangelist records a reply of our Lord to the censure passed on Him for breaking the Sabbath, strongly illustrative of what I have been saying: viz. that He had a right to *work* on the Sabbath, *because his Father* had been doing so all along; the process of vegetation, the motions of the heavenly bodies, and all the other *works* of God, going on without inter-

manded him to “*take up his bed*, and go to his house:” now, the objections of the Pharisees to such an act of charity as healing on the Sabbath day, may be regarded as frivolous; but the man’s carrying his bed was a manifest violation of the Sabbath, and could not be called an act of necessity or charity; yet it was *expressly commanded*; on purpose, as it seems, to show, that “the Son of Man” claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath;” (that is, to have the Divine power of dispensing with God’s positive enactments) of the *justness* of which claim the miracle He had wrought afforded proof.

So also, when his disciples were censured for rubbing out the grains of corn on the Sabbath, his defence of them plainly turns on his *own especial* authority. He alludes to the case of David and his companions, who ate, not without the *permission of the Priest*, the shew-bread which it was not lawful for any but the priests to eat: this was, 1st, tacitly acknowledging that the act of his disciples was in itself as unlawful as the eating of the shew-bread by any but a priest; 2dly, it was claiming for Himself, at least, equal authority with the priest, who dispensed with the rule in David’s favour; 3dly, it was claiming rather *more* authority; because there was *not*, in this case, as in David’s, the plea of *urgent necessity*. But then, He proceeds to compare this case with that of the “priests in the Temple” who were permitted to profane

mission on the Sabbath. “My Father worketh, hitherto; and I work.” The force of the Greek present tense in this place is hardly conveyed by the English present, but rather by one of our compound tenses; viz. “My Father has been working, up to this time.”

the Sabbath, by doing the necessary work for the Temple-service: now, this could not mean that the example of the priests in the Temple authorized all men to go about their ordinary business on the Sabbath; but that example did apply to the disciples who were occupied in ministering to *Him, who was Himself the Temple*, in whom “all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt;”^ε and who, on another occasion, to which I conceive He was in this place alluding, claims for Himself the very title of the “Temple.”^h Lastly, He declares that the “Son of Man is Lord¹ of the Sabbath, “inasmuch as the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” On this passage, which has often been but indistinctly understood, it may be remarked, 1st, that it implies an actual violation of the Sabbath; else it would have been needless to plead a supreme *power over* that ordinance: 2dly, that it not only cannot imply that any other man had a similar dispensing power, but implies the very reverse; else it would have been nugatory to claim for the “*Son of Man*” (the title by which Jesus distinguished Himself) a power which others might equally claim; 3dly, that these are not (as some have represented) two distinct remarks, but stand in the relation of *Premiss and Conclusion*; “the Sabbath was made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath; *therefore* the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” He evidently means that though He made no pretensions to a dis-

^ε Mark ii. 23—28. Matt. xii. Luke vi. See Hinds's “Catechists' Manual,” on the same passage.

^h Compare Matt. xii. 6. with John ii. 19—22.

¹ κύριος.

persing power in respect of *moral* duties, (man being *made for them*) *positive* ordinances on the contrary, being "made for man" (*i. e.* designed as means,—often as local or temporary means—to facilitate man's improvement) might be dispensed with or abrogated by the same authority which established them; viz. by the *divine* authority, which He claimed. The reasoning, at full length, and stated regularly, will stand thus: "Any positive ordinance (*i. e.* one made for Man, and not Man for it) may be dispensed with by my (divine) authority: the Sabbath is such an ordinance: therefore the Sabbath may be dispensed with by my authority."

Jesus however, though he studiously set forth his own dispensing power over the Sabbath, did not, during his ministry on earth, give any general release from the observance, either of that, or of the rest of the Levitical Law. This remained in full force, till its types had been fulfilled by Himself,—till his Kingdom, which He had proclaimed as "at hand," was come. And when it did come, his Apostles were, as I have said, not commissioned by Him to change the day, and perpetuate the obligation, of the Jewish Sabbath; but they and their successors, even the Church which he promised to be with "always even unto the end of the world," were endued with ample power to enact regulations with a view to Christian edification; and among the rest, to set apart festival-days, such as the Lord's day, Christmas-day, Good-Friday, Holy-Thursday, &c.

For, after all, what need is there to bring ourselves

under the yoke of the Mosaic Law for the sake of enforcing the observance of the Lord's day, which is not even a part of that Law? The first day of the week is set apart by all Christian Churches, as a religious festival in celebration of Christ's resurrection, agreeably to the practice of the Apostles and other early Christians.^k The custom of the primitive Church would not, indeed, *alone* make this an imperative duty; since the "Love-feasts"¹ and some other ancient practices are now, by the rightful authority of the Church, disused; but their early custom gives *additional* solemnity to an observance that *has* the sanction of the Church — a sanction which would, even of itself, be sufficient. For when our Lord "appointed to his Apostles a kingdom," and declared that "whatsoever they bound on earth should be bound in heaven," promising also to be "with them always even unto the end of the world," He must surely have conferred on his Church a permanent "power to ordain rites and ceremonies," and to institute and abrogate religious festivals, "provided nothing be done contrary to God's word;" and must have given the ratification of his authority to what should be thus ordained.

^k And the use of the *hebdomadal* division of time, which brought round the festival every seven days, followed naturally from our Lord himself and his first disciples, being Jews. The very record of the Saviour's having risen "on the first day of the *week*," would of course lead the Christians to reckon their time by weeks, and to commemorate the event one day in seven; especially as they received the gospel from those who had always been in the habit of so reckoning.

¹ ἀγάραι. Jude 12.

For if his expressions have not this extent, what *do* they mean?

But if any one, not satisfied with this, sufficient; foundation, attempts to strengthen the obligation by an appeal to the Old Testament, he is not merely making an unnecessary and *useless* addition, but he is *nullifying* the very obligation which he seeks to enhance: he is not merely superadding the shadow to the substance, but *losing* the substance, while he catches at the shadow; he is, as I before said, *removing* the institution from a rock, to place it on the sand. For, if the positive institutions of the Old Testament are wholly abrogated, *THEN*, (and not otherwise) all days become in themselves indifferent; and in such a case the Church has, as I have above remarked, full power to sanctify any that may be thought most fitting: but, on the other hand, the Church has *not* power to ordain anything *contrary* to *God's word*: so that if the precepts relative to the ancient Sabbath are acknowledged to remain in force, *then* the observance of the first day of the week, instead of the seventh, becomes an unwarantable presumption. This therefore is a case in which (unless we will consecrate *two* sabbath-days in each week) we must absolutely make our choice between the Law and the Gospel.

My reason for introducing this discussion I have stated at the beginning of it; viz. its necessary connexion with the argument of the fifth Essay, which must fall to the ground if the perpetual obligation of the fourth commandment be admitted. But some, to whom most

of the foregoing arguments may have appeared so obvious as hardly to need being developed at length, may, perhaps, wonder that I should so fully have discussed the subject in these days, when the prevailing fault is rather a neglect, than an over-scrupulous observance of religious ordinances and festivals. I will conclude, therefore, by a brief statement of my reasons for doing so;—the additional reasons, I mean, over and above the connexion of the subject with the argument of the fifth Essay.

The first and principal of these, is, the very one which is urged on the opposite side; viz. the prevailing disregard among many persons of religious festivals, and, among the rest, of the Lord's day. For this surely makes it the more necessary, for Christian ministers at least, to inculcate a duty which is thus liable to be neglected. And in doing so, they are bound, I should say in prudence, but at least in Christian sincerity, to place that duty on its true grounds. They have no right, even should they think it expedient, to encourage, or tacitly to connive at, misconceptions on the subject. If I should either refer to the Mosaic Law, as the foundation of the duty of observing the Lord's day, or so express myself as to leave my hearers to suppose (as a great proportion of them will, if the contrary be not stated) that I *meant* to refer to that Law as binding, I should be guilty of directly or indirectly fostering error. According to the principles, therefore, laid down in Essay I., I cannot allow myself even to deliberate as to the expediency of such a procedure.

I cannot but think, however, that the duty may be even more forcibly inculcated, if we continually refer to the resurrection of Christ as commemorated on the Lord's day;—to the *proof* of his resurrection afforded by this *monument* more durable than brass or stone, the unbroken commemoration of the event (nearly one hundred thousand times over) from its occurrence to this time;—to his repeated appearances to the disciples in bodily person, on the first day of the week;—to his promise of being no less present, though by his unseen Spirit, in each congregation of Christians assembled in his name, on that day;^m—to their hopes of hereafter enjoying, along with the Apostles, his presence in beatific vision, on that great Lord's day which shall never have an end;—in short, to the *Christian* motives for the solemn observance of the festival.

(2dly.) Another reason for dwelling on the view I have taken, is, the strong disposition in many Christians to satisfy their conscience by devoting to God *only* one day in seven, while the rest of their time is given up to the world, with little or no thought of religion. One instance out of many that might be given of the tendency towards this *compromising* system, is the practice of some who have family-prayer on Sunday

^m Many Christians, I suspect, from not being accustomed to hear the morning and evening-service on week-days, are apt to forget that the Composers of our Liturgy did not frame any Service especially appropriated to the Sunday, (with the single exception of Easter-day); it is perhaps to be wished they had, and had introduced into it some reference to the occasion of the festival.

only; though it is a duty manifestly still *more* requisite on each week-day.

Christians need, therefore, to be often reminded that they are required not merely not to “think their own thoughts” on one day in the week, but, as the redeemed of Christ, to “live henceforth not unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again;” and “whatsoever they do, to do all to the glory of God.” Numerous early Christian Fathers, accordingly, in their commentaries on the Decalogue, describe the Jewish Sabbath as corresponding, in the analogous scheme of Christianity, not so much to the Lord’s day, as to the whole life of the Christian,—to his abstinence from all works that may draw off his affections from God,—and to his complete dedication of himself to his service. See Athanasius, Hom. de Sab.; Hieronymus, in Decalog.; Origen, Tract. 19. in Matt.; Chrysost. Hom. 39. in Matt. xii.; Justin Martyr, Dial. cum Tryphone.; Clemens Alexandr. Strom. lib. iv.; and Augustine, *passim*; all of whom hold this language.

(3dly.) It seems to me very important to protest earnestly against admitting a *dangerous principle*; even though in some particular instances, the conclusion it leads to may be right, or may be insignificant. If we acknowledge, for instance, the perpetual authority of the precepts respecting the ancient Sabbath, but take the liberty of changing, without any Scriptural warrant, the day, or the prescribed mode of observing it, is there not danger that the same principle may be applied to an indefinite number of other cases also?—that this and

that Scripture-rule may come to be modified according to our fancy? till, at length, like the Romish Church, we shall "make the word of God of none effect, by our tradition." For it should be remembered, that neither that Church, nor, probably, the ancient Jewish, nor any other, *began* by the most *flagrant* encroachments on divine authority. It is in small, and comparatively harmless points, that a false principle begins to be admitted and acted on, till its poison has been received into the system, and gradually advances from the extremities towards the vitals.

(4thly.) Lastly, the prevailing dislike to acknowledge any divinely-sanctioned power in a *Church*, has greatly weighed with me. I am convinced that in many Christians who are strenuous advocates for the observance of the Lord's day, their anxiety to refer to the positive precepts of the Law, for the authority of the ordinance, is a consequence either of their aversion to admit any such power to be vested in a Christian community, and binding on its members, or from their never having known or thought at all whether there is or is not any such right existing. Now to such persons it is very useful to show, that an institution, which they would be very unwilling to see deprived of all divine sanction, can derive such sanction from no other source than from the power conferred by Christ on every Christian Church. For, on the one hand, the rightful authority of any government or code of laws, *generally*, and, on the other hand, the obligation of any *particular* precept that rests entirely on that authority, are two points

which mutually prove each other; whichever of them we admit, the other must be admitted also. Thus, as I have above said, not only does it follow that, if the Mosaic Law is binding, the Jewish Sabbath ought to be kept; but also, conversely, if the Jewish Sabbath is an ordinance we are bound to, on the authority of the Mosaic Law, then, we must admit also that the whole of that Law is binding. And so also in the present case; it not only follows, if we admit the authority of the Church, that we must observe the Lord's day as She has ordained; but also, if we hold as indispensable the observance of the Lord's day, and that, on the Church's authority (which we must do, if it can be established, as a binding ordinance, by nothing else), then, we must admit that our Church's claims to such a power are valid, and rest on the appointment of our Lord.

As for the authorities of able and learned, but uninspired divines, I am myself inclined to attach the less weight to them in the present case, from the character of the question itself. The perpetual obligation under the gospel-dispensation of one of the positive precepts of the Old Testament, (with or without alteration) and of one too which concerns every individual Christian all his life long, whether learned or unlearned, is what, I cannot but feel persuaded, the Apostles, had such been their intention, would have recorded so plainly as to leave no doubt on any man's mind. Such a duty is not what they would have left to be made out by skilful Hebraists from a critical examination of doubtful texts, fifteen or sixteen centuries after their time. For the benefit of

those however who may wish, from various reasons, to consult the writings of eminent theologians on the present subject, I refer the reader (in addition to the Authors already cited) to the learned Dr. Peter Heylin's "History of the Sabbath," "Bp. Sanderson's^a Cases of Conscience;" (Case of the Sabbath) "Paley's Moral Philosophy," Vol. ii. chap. 7, and the Bp. of Lincoln's late publication of "Selections from the Works of Justin."

An able discussion of the question *on both sides* may also be found in two very well-written articles in the British Critic: the one side being maintained in No. X. p. 377; the other, in No. XIII. p. 185.

NOTE B, to ESSAY VIII. p. 327.

WITH a view to the mere commemoration of our Lord's sacrifice, and expression of our faith in his atonement, the mere *breaking* of the bread, and *pouring out* of the wine in the Lord's Supper, might have been sufficient: but the bread and wine, are by Christ's appointment *eaten and drunk*; in conformity with his declaration, "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you:"^o "He that eateth my

^a He was the last reviser of the book of Common-prayer, and author of the Preface to it.

^o See "Hinds's Catechists' Manual," p. 265, to the author of which I am indebted for the substance of these remarks.

flesh, and drinketh my blood, the same *dwelleth in me, and I in him.*" What then is it of which the devout communicants are really partakers, under the outward symbols of bread and wine? Surely, of the Spirit of Christ; for, hereby know we that He *dwelleth in us*, by his Spirit which He hath given us;" and hence, Paul's expression, that we are all *made to drink* (ἐποτίσθημεν, 1 Cor. xii. 13.) "into one Spirit."

This obvious interpretation, the Romanists (and afterwards the Lutherans) were led to overlook, partly at least, I conceive, from the habit of keeping too much out of sight the divine unity, and of regarding the Son and the Holy Ghost, too much as distinct Beings; so that to *partake of Christ* must, they thought, be something different from *partaking of the Holy Spirit*. Hence they inferred that the communicants receive the literal, material, body and blood of Christ; and they accordingly boast that they alone interpret the Scripture declarations not figuratively. There is no need to adduce the well-known refutations of this extravagant doctrine; but there is one answer to it, which is usually overlooked, and which goes to overthrow the foundation of it; viz. that if we *could* actually receive into our mouths the very flesh and blood of Christ, this could not, *of itself*, be productive of any benefit to the soul: it might, if God willed it, be the appointed *token* and *means* of our receiving such benefit; even as the water of the pool of Siloam was, of restored sight; but it could not *itself* confer any spiritual advantage, any more than water could cure blindness. It must therefore, after all, be in a spiritual and *figurative*

sense that Christ says, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;" if they *were* literally eaten and drunk, they must still be the sign of something else, represented and conveyed by them. So that the violence done to Scripture and to reason, for the sake of avoiding a figurative interpretation, does not, after all, even accomplish that object.

The error of transubstantiation, the English Church has guarded against most carefully, by declaring that the bread and wine remain unchanged,—that they are only a *sign* of Christ's body and blood,—and that it is only "after a spiritual manner" that his body and blood are received by the faithful. But it would have been better perhaps to have added to this, for the benefit of the unlearned, a statement that the bread and wine not only are *merely a sign*, but are a *sign of a sign*: i. e. that *they* represent our Lord's flesh and blood, and that his flesh and blood again are a sign of something else. This is indeed implied, when it is said that Christ's body and blood are "*spiritually* received," and that it "strengthens and refreshes the *soul*;" for it is manifest that *literal, material*, flesh and blood cannot be *spiritually* received, or refresh the *soul*. But for the sake of avoiding those vague and confused ideas, which are apt to lead ultimately to the regarding of the Eucharist as a mere memorial, it might have been better to state distinctly what it is that the faithful communicants do really partake of. That which strengthens and refreshes the *soul* of Christians, as bread and wine do man's body, is "the Spirit of Christ," whereby "He dwelleth in us,

and we in Him;" for "it is the *Spirit* that quickeneth ; (ζωοποιῶν) the flesh profiteth nothing." John vi. 63. And as it is the soul or spirit of a man that animates (quickeneth) his body, which would otherwise be lifeless ; so, Christians, who are, themselves, the figurative Body of Christ, are *quicken*ed,—receive life and vigour—" strength and refreshment," from the Spirit which dwelleth in them ; they " are the temple of the Holy Ghost ;" " the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit." And since it is *as* members of the holy *community* that individual Christians obtain this gift, of this circumstance they are reminded by their partaking *together* of the Lord's Supper,—“ the communion (κοινωνία) of the blood of Christ :” (1 Cor. x. 16,) “ we have *all* been, in one spirit, baptized into *one* Body ;” (*i. e.* all admitted by baptism—being born of water and of the Spirit,—into the Church, which is Christ's Body) “ and have *all* been *made to drink* into *one* Spirit.” 1 Cor. xii. 13.

THE END.

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